Fury of the Strongman

written by

S. Craig Zahler

contacts

Dallas Sonnier Producer 213.400.5246
&
Julien Thuan United Talent Agency 310.860.3791

Titlecard: Summer, 1976

INT. FRONT ROOM / THE EXHIBITION OF BIZARRE HORRORS - DUSK

CIRCUS MUSIC plays as two tickets are RIPPED. A pair of skinny sixteen-year-olds in jeans and t-shirts who are named ROBERT and SUZIE walk through a flap into the front room of a green-and-yellow tent. Ahead of the adolescents is a banner that reads, 'The Exhibition of Bizarre Horrors'. A dripping red arrow points to the left, where stands a dark opening.

BARKER (O.S.)
(Bronx accent; amplified through a bullhorn)
Are you the kind of person who rubbernecks at car accidents? Are you the kind of person who enjoys spending time in abattoirs? Are you the kind of person who watches the nightly news?

The teenaged couple proceeds toward the passageway.

BARKER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
If you answered 'Yes!' to any of these questions, then The Exhibition of Bizarre Horrors is for you!

Anxious, the skinny blonde looks at her boyfriend.

SUZIE
Think this's gonna be scary?

The smirking fellow curls his right arm around his girlfriend's waist and pulls her close to his side.

ROBERT
Terrifying.

INT. VIEWING HALL / THE EXHIBITION OF BIZARRE HORRORS - SAME

Robert guides Suzie into the dark viewing hall. Sneakers SCUFF the dirt as the couple follows dripping red arrows toward a light. The skinny young man places his right hand on his girlfriend's rump, and the blonde relocated this salacious extremity to her waist.

ROBERT
I was just protecting you.

SUZIE
Felt like a different sorta idea.

Toward the dimly lighted area, the teenaged couple proceeds.

ROBERT
Ninety percent of attacks in this country are from the rear.

SUZIE
One hundred percent of yours are.

Suzie grows anxious as Robert guides her forward. The couple reaches a luminous opening, which is the first exhibit, and then stops.

SUZIE (CONT'D)
What is that thing?

The skinny blonde points at a strange animal skeleton that is suspended in the air in front of a painted mountain range. This dead creature is about the size of a cat and has a narrow head from which protrude four long fangs. Sprouting from its back are two large wings.

SUZIE (CONT'D)
Some kind of bird or something?

ROBERT
Its 'The Flying Rat of Puerto Rico.'

Robert points to the left at an A-frame sign, which has a painted illustration of the horrifying menace with gray fur, a long pink tail, and glaring red eyes. Blood drips from its fangs and claws as it soars through the night sky.

This vividly rendered image elicits a shudder from Suzie.

SUZIE
You think it's real?

ROBERT
I think it's a possum skeleton that somebody glued some buzzard wings onto.

SUZIE
I hope you're right.

ROBERT
Me too. We've got enough Puerto Ricans in this country without ones that can fly here.

Somebody else enters the viewing hall. Wanting privacy, Robert guides Suzie around the next corner. His right hand lands upon his girlfriend's rump and is relocated by her to a more polite location.

SUZIE
Don't paw me in here. This place's creepy.

ROBERT
Then you better shut off those magnets in your tush.

The teenaged couple reaches the next exhibit and stops. Repulsed by what lies on display, Suzie wrinkles her face and presses herself close to Robert.

SUZIE
Yuck.

Illuminated by a spotlight and preserved with fluid inside of a large pickle jar is a pinkish-gray human fetus that has one eye in the middle of its plump face.

SUZIE (CONT'D)
That looks real.

Robert nods his head in agreement and eyes the A-frame sign that stands to the right.

ROBERT
(reading)
"Cerella, the Baby Cyclops is from Peru. She died when her mother was six months pregnant."
(he looks at the jar)
Looks normal except for the eyeball. Her little toes and fingers are all there.

Uneasy, the skinny blonde turns away from the exhibit.

SUZIE
C'mon. Let's go.

Robert kisses Suzie on the cheek and nods his head. At present, the teenaged couple proceeds up the hallway, rounds another corner, and comes upon an illuminated vivarium that is embedded in the wall. Behind the thick glass is a cowering white mouse and a coiled green snake.

Robert looks at a placard above the vivarium.

ROBERT
This one's from China. His name's 'Hiss Hiss.'
The snake--not the mouse.

SUZIE
I knew which. Is he alive?

The skinny fellow TAPS the glass. Awakened, the serpent raises two heads and looks at the spectators with four poisonous black eyes.

SUZIE (CONT'D)
Did they glue that other head on there?

ROBERT
Probably.

Two mouths open, and the coiled body jerks. Snake heads flash across the cage and sink fangs into the cowering mouse.

YELPING, Suzie turns away from the vivarium. Hiss Hiss closes its jaws on the struggling mouse. Tiny claws CLICK and SCRAPE the unyielding glass as rodent bones SNAP.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Wanna see what I snuck from home?

SUZIE
Later. Let's go.

Robert and Suzie walk up the viewing hall, round another corner, and see a luminous portal, beyond which stand several SPECTATORS who all look in the same direction.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
Twenty-three hot dogs.

The teenaged couple proceeds toward the opening.

MALE VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Six bags of potato chips. Ten candy bars.

INT. SHOWCASE ROOM / THE EXHIBITION OF BIZARRE HORRORS - SAME

Robert and Suzie enter the showcase room, a spacious enclosure that is currently inhabited by nineteen SPECTATORS. The teenaged couple finds an opening beside three middle-aged LATINOS who have bell-bottoms, sandals, and bandanas. Upon the stage and sitting atop something that cannot be seen is BARREL, an obese black man of thirty who weighs more than six hundred pounds. Denim overalls, a plaid shirt, and cowboy boots cover much of his anatomy.

BARREL
I washed all that down with two-liters bottles of cherry soda, ginger ale, and orange.
(he pats his belly)
That's what I had for lunch--though dinner's my big meal.

A few spectators CHUCKLE, and Barrel grins. Two golden teeth flash inside of his mouth.

BARREL (CONT'D)
I've got time for one more question...

A slender, PRIM WOMAN of sixty who stands beside her short BALD HUSBAND raises her hand.

BARREL (CONT'D)
Yes Ma'am?

PRIM WOMAN
Aren't you worried that all of this eating is going to kill you?

The crowd grows uneasy.

BARREL
No Ma'am. I'm not worried that all this eating is gonna kill me--I know that it will, and I find comfort in that fact.
(he shrugs)
Seems like better way to go than just waiting around for cancer or dementia like most people.

The Prim Woman wrinkles her mouth with distaste, and several Spectators grin.

BARREL (CONT'D)
Thank you all for coming and for your donations. Please stick around for Harry the Human Crab, who's coming up next.

Straining, the obese man leans forward, grabs a bucket that is marked 'Donations', and rises from his seat, which is an oak barrel. The small stage CREAKS as he walks towards the left edge. Robert, Suzie, and most of the Spectators CLAP.

SUZIE
(whispered)
Are we clapping 'cause of his act or 'cause he can walk?

ROBERT
(whispered)
Not sure.

Barrel reaches the left side of the stage, carefully descends the two steps, waves one thick arm at the crowd, flashes his grin, and disappears through a flap in the tent. Something SCRAPES and SHUFFLES across the dirt, and the audience turns to face the other side of the showroom.

Robert and Suzie soon get a clearer view of the new arrival. Climbing onto the right side of the stage is a dark-haired man in a bright red shirt whose arms terminate with splayed, two-fingered hands. These limbs support his weight rather than his legs, which are far shorter, badly curved, and do not seem functional. This person is HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB.

Uneasy, Robert, Suzie, and other Spectators watch the anomalous performer walk on his hands across the wood while dragging his limp legs. In the middle of the stage, he stops and faces the crowd.

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB
(Boston Accent)
For my first trick, I'll need a pack of cigarettes. For this to work right, they have to be non-mentholated. Unfiltered also helps.

A PLUMP WOMAN and one of the Latinos withdraw packs from their pockets and hold them aloft.

LATINO
I've got one.

PLUMP WOMAN
Me too.

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB
Throw them up here--near me, not at me. I'm a person, not a sea lion.

The helpful audience members toss the cigarette boxes onto the stage. Employing two-fingered hands, the performer gathers the cartons and places them in his back pocket.

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB (CONT'D)
That trick's called, 'The Disappearing Cigarettes.'

Comprehension comes to the Latino, and some Spectators LAUGH.

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB (CONT'D)
For my next-

LATINO
Hey. You can't-

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB
Shut up, hombre.
(he clear his throat)
For my next routine, I'll need a fifty dollar bill.
If nobody has one, I'll attempt to use a twenty.

EXT. CIRCUS MIDWAY - EARLY EVENING

Thirty minutes have passed. Pregnant clouds hang in the sky, and CIRCUS MUSIC cycles deliriously as Robert and Suzie hasten from the sideshow onto the sparsely populated midway. Four hundred feet away from them looms the red-and-green striped circus tent.

The skinny fellow eyes a nearby booth, the 'Belly Buster', which offers popcorn, soda, beer, hot dogs, cotton candy, and caramel apples. This concession stand is currently being attended by Barrel, the fat man.

BARREL
Hot dogs! Twenty for twenty dollars.

Suzie takes Robert's hand and pulls him toward the big top.

SUZIE
We don't have time. The show already started, and I wanna make sure we see the lions.

The teenaged couple hastens past 'Belly Buster', two overflowing garbage cans, and three portable bathrooms. Ahead of them and on the left is a game booth that proclaims, 'Young & Naked Chicks. Guaranteed Live!'

Robert glances at this attraction and sees larger-than-life-sized illustrations of buxom, nude women whose breasts and groins are open holes into which objects may be thrown. Satin pillows, riding crops, and sequined masks hang from the ceiling of the booth, which is operated by DIRTY RITA, a seventy-nine year-old woman in a lacy black bustier who currently holds two rubber balls in her right hand.

DIRTY RITA
C'mere handsome. You look like you know how to use a pair.

Pausing, Robert inspects the game booth more closely.

ROBERT
Where're the 'Young & Naked Chicks'?

Dirty Rita points to the back corner of the stand, where sits a wire coop that contains two CHIRPING yellow chicks.

DIRTY RITA
Fully nude.

Eyeing the skinny fellow and his girlfriend, the old woman gestures at the prizes that hang overhead.

DIRTY RITA (CONT'D)
Wanna win your sweetheart a satin pillow that has a wide variety of pre-marital uses?

SUZIE
Sorry--we've gotta get to the show.

Suzie pulls Robert up the midway toward the circus tent.

DIRTY RITA
Perhaps the wiser choice would be a riding crop!

INT. CIRCUS TENT - MOMENTS LATER

Two hundred and fifty SPECTATORS inhabit a third of the available seats within this striped red-and-green circus tent, the center of which is held eighty-five feet from the ground by a thick king's pole. Spotlights shine from four directions onto the performing area, which is of sand and circumscribed by a white and yellow ring. Five rows back from this perimeter, Robert leads Suzie across the bleachers to an open space.

ROBERT
Are these seats good enough for the governor's daughter?

The skinny blonde rolls her eyes.

SUZIE
They're fine.

The teenaged couple sits.

ROBERT
Now we can enjoy what I snuck from home.

Robert raises his left pant leg, removes a whisky flask from his sock, and takes a deep draft. His eyes water, and he COUGHS as he offers the drink to Suzie.

Inside of the performing ring, a Native American of thirty-eight years who wears a brown leather vest, blue jeans, and moccasins raises a throwing knife over his head. This grim fellow is YOUNG MOUNTAIN. Thirty feet away from him and fastened by ropes to a red, upright wooden plank is PALOMA, a twenty-eight year-old, big-eyed Mexican target girl who has long hair, a beaded bikini skirt, and a matching top. Knives are wedged into the board above and below her outspread arms and on either side of her thighs and hips.

PALOMA
And you left the toilet seat up again.

A (hidden) drummer ROLLS a snare. Young Mountain whips his arm forward. Flashing, the blade WHISTLES through the air and THUNKS into the board six inches from Paloma's right hand. A cymbal CRASHES, and the audience APPLAUDS.

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
Nag.

PALOMA
And you never buy me jewelry like you used to.

The knife thrower turns to the table, withdraws two blades, and faces his target. Again, a DRUMROLL sounds.

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
Would you like some earrings?

Feigning fear, Paloma shakes her head ‘no’. The DRUMROLL continues as Young Mountain aims, takes a breath, and flings both weapons. Flashing, the knives WHISTLE through the air and THUNK into the board. Blades quiver beside each of the target girl’s ears. A cymbal CRASHES, and people APPLAUD.

YOUNG MOUNTAIN (CONT’D)
Do you like them?

Paloma looks at the knives that quiver in the board on either side of her head.

PALOMA
They’re too gaudy. Did you save the receipt?

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
Let me see...

Young Mountain digs into a pocket, wrinkles his brow, roots around in another one, nods his head, withdraws a knife, and whips it at Paloma. The blade THUNKS into the wood only three inches above her head. A sheet of white paper unrolls from its hilt and hangs down in front of her face. The unseen drummer CRASHES a cymbal, and the audience APPLAUDS.

The target girl reads the paper, wrinkles her brow in confusion, and then shakes her head.

PALOMA
This isn’t the receipt...
It’s a request for a divorce!

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
The boss told me that this act needs to have a happy ending.

A RIMSHOT echoes. APPLAUSE and CHEERS come from men in the crowd whose wives then frown and throw elbows.

Young Mountain walks over to Paloma, whom he then releases from bondage. Holding hands, the partners bow. The audience enthusiastically APPLAUDS the act.

In the fifth row, Robert takes another deep draft from his father’s whiskey flask. His eyes are watery, and his cheeks are red. Suzie also looks tipsy.

SUZIE
Don’t get drunk.

ROBERT
I didn’t.

APPLAUSE dwindles, and an unseen trumpeter plays a long, REGAL MELODY.

Spotlights shift from the knife-throwing duo to the RINGMASTER, a tall, lean, and silver-haired gentleman of sixty who wears a pin-striped blue tuxedo, a bow tie, and a top hat.

RINGMASTER
(English Accent)
Young Mountain and his charming wife Paloma do very much appreciate your applause.
It is worth pointing out that they have been a part of this circus for over six years, and never once during that time have I seen them at odds with each other.
Perhaps the key to every happy marriage is a knife?

An equal amount of CLAPS and GROANS come from the crowd. In the fifth row, Robert drinks more whisky.

The unseen drummer plays a TRIBAL BEAT, and the lights dim.

RINGMASTER (CONT'D)
Our next performer shall present a compelling argument that the best way to achieve harmony is with a whip...

The POUNDING TOM-TOMS grows more urgent, and a spotlight brightens directly over a circular cage that stands on the far side of the performing ring. Within this chain-link enclosure sit three adult lions, one of which is ZULU, a male with a large mane. The beasts survey the circus tent as the TRIBAL BEAT grows louder.

A whip CRACKS, and the POUNDING TOM-TOMS are abruptly replaced by a sharp MILITARY MARCH.

The chain-link door swings wide. Into the spotlighted cage walks the lion tamer JOHNSON, a stocky, thirty-five year-old man in khaki clothing, long boots, and a pith helmet. A notable brown mustache adorns his imperious face, and a thick whip dangles from his right hand. The audience APPLAUDS as the lion tamer closes the door and gestures at the crowd.

JOHNSON
Thank you all very much. Thank you.

Johnson eyes the lions as he walks forward. His crisp steps carry him past five metal hoops, a large toy sports car, and into the company of the bestial trio.

JOHNSON (CONT'D)
Wave at the audience.

Johnson gestures grandly with his free hand, but elicits no response from Zulu and the two lionesses. The whip CRACKS against the ground, and a cloud of dust glows in the spotlight. Again, the trainer motions to the crowd.

JOHNSON (CONT'D)
Wave at the audience.

No response comes from the lions. One of the females YAWNS, and a few people in the audience CHUCKLE.

The whip CRACKS against the ground and raises another luminous cloud of dust. An irritated lioness GROWLS at Johnson, takes one step forward, and GROWLS again. The human sternly eyes the beast.

JOHNSON (CONT'D)
Back-

The lion tamer gestures with his whip. Cowed, the feline returns to her peers.

JOHNSON (CONT'D)
Wave at the audience.

GROWLING, Zulu swats the air with his huge right paw. This marginal display of obedience wrings a little APPLAUSE from the crowd. The other female ROARS angrily at Johnson.

Concerned, the lion tamer glances at a dark opening that is in the rear tent wall and TAPS his left wrist twice.

INT. PERFORMERS' LEAN-TO / ADJOINING THE CIRCUS TENT - SAME

On the far side of that opening and seated within the performers' lean-to are the Ringmaster and LAUGHY, a clown in white makeup who wears a baggy camouflage one-piece (which has a 'Laughy' name tag), oversized combat boots, a variety of water and cap guns, a bandolier, and an army helmet. This sixty-two year-old comedian catches the lion tamer's signal, rises from his stool, and faces in the opposite direction. Lying in the back on a patio recliner and reading a newspaper by candlelight is a fifty-eight-year-old midget in a well-tailored dark blue suit who has (dyed) jet black hair and a thin mustache. This dapper fellow goes by the name NICKEL HARRINGTON.

LAUGHY
Boss?

Nickel does not raise his gaze from the newspaper.

NICKEL
(Bronx Accent)
Laughy?

LAUGHY
The kittens are grouchy.

NICKEL
Johnson signaled?

LAUGHY
Twice. Should I go t-

NICKEL
I'll go. I need to stretch my branches.

Nickel collapses his newspaper, rises to his feet, and buttons his jacket. Shiny, hard-soled shoes compress grit as he walks through the exit flap.

EXT. CAMPGROUNDS BEHIND THE CIRCUS TENT - SAME

The diminutive boss emerges from the add-on and enters a lot that is illuminated by floodlights and has two eighteen wheelers, nine motorhomes, a dozen trailers, an array of personal tents, and a covered eating area that is currently inhabited by three Mexican CREWMEN who drink and a couple of partly costumed PERFORMERS who smoke.

Nickel turns to the right and walks toward a structure that stands apart from the camp. Corrugated metal sheets comprise the four sides of this small building, and stacked cinder blocks hold these walls in place. A deep male GRUNT and a loud EXHALATION sound within this shack.

The diminutive boss KNOCKS upon the corrugated metal.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
Yeah?

NICKEL
The kittens are grouchy.

The unseen man GRUNTS and EXHALES deeply.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
Five minute delay?

NICKEL
Ten minute delay.

The person within the metal shack INHALES.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
Okay.

Nickel turns away and sees something. Forty feet off and approaching is WENDY, a tall blond woman of twenty-six who wears a white coat over a blue sequin bikini and holds a pair of high-heels in her right hand. Her sandals SCUFF the grit as she walks toward the metal shack, and her eyes are red from crying.

NICKEL
What's wrong?

WENDY
It's just some personal stuff.

NICKEL
It’s business stuff if you go on stage looking like grandma just fell down the stairs.

Another GRUNT and EXHALATION sound within the metal shack.

WENDY
I don’t go on for an hour. And I’ve got eye drops in case.

Another INHALATION sounds beyond the corrugated walls. The diminutive boss glances at the roofless building, throws a skeptical look at the blonde, and walks away.

Taking a deep breath, Wendy circumnavigates the small building and stops in front of its lone doorway.

INT. METAL SHACK - SAME

One of the floodlights illuminates the interior of the metal shack. Lying there upon a bench that is comprised of raw wood and cinder blocks and holding a barbell with two rigid fists is CHAD WOODBURN, a shirtless thirty-nine year-old in jeans who has receding copper-brown hair and the massive muscular physique of a champion weight-lifter. A GRUNT and a thick EXHALATION issue from his mouth as he pushes three hundred and fifty pounds off of his chest and into the air.

WENDY
Hey.

The strongman’s green eyes flicker to the blonde who stands outside of the metal shack. Sweat runs down his straining face, which has a deep scar on the left cheek that runs all the way down to his chin. His ear on that side has a piece missing at the top, and his nose is crooked.

WENDY (CONT’D)
Can we talk about this?

Woodburn INHALES as he lowers the barbell to his chest.

WOODBURN
Did you change your mind?

WENDY
I didn’t.

The strongman GRUNTS and EXHALES as he pushes the weights into the air.

WENDY (CONT’D)
You’re gonna ignore me?

Woodburn INHALES as he lowers the barbell to his chest.

WOODBURN
We don't need to have the same argument twice.
And it's real important that I control my anger.

WENDY
I know.

The strongman repositions his fists and tightens his grip.

WENDY (CONT'D)
It's only a topless act.

GRUNTING, Woodburn pushes the weights toward the night sky. Perspiration drips down his knotted arms.

WENDY (CONT'D)
I know my limits.

The strongman lowers the barbell to his chest, eyes the blonde for a moment, and returns his attention to the stars.

WOODBURN
I don't think you do.

WENDY
I never realized how little you thought of me.

WOODBURN
I've been in the circus since before I owned a razor, and I've seen what happens to girls who get lax about this sorta thing.
(he adjusts his grip on the barbell)
Two years ago, you wouldn't've gone topless. That was the line you wouldn't cross.
Today, you're okay with it.

WENDY
My mermaid routine had me in bikini already. It's not a big deal.

The strongman GRUNTS as he shoves the barbell from his chest. His thick arms extend all the way and stop. Iron disk CLANK.

WOODBURN
It's proof that money and circumstances can change your values.

WENDY
Chad. It's just tits. Are you that insecure?

WOODBURN
It's you crossing a line you said you wouldn't cross. Everything you say you won't do is on that other side.

WENDY
I'm not gonna blow or screw anyone.

Woodburn INHALES as he lowers the barbell to his chest.

WOODBURN
I bet ninety-nine percent of the prostitutes in this country said that at one time.

WENDY
Fuck you.

The strongman GRUNTS as he bench presses the load.

WENDY (CONT'D)
So you're gonna throw away two and a half years 'cause I'm doing a topless act?

WOODBURN
That isn't a question.

WENDY
It's the truth.

Irked, Woodburn throws his arms backwards. The barbell flies from his grip, THUDS on the ground, rolls two feet, and CLANKS against cinder blocks. Taking a deep breath, the strongman sits up and eyes the blonde.

WOODBURN
You're the one who decided that earning extra money is more important than us.

WENDY
But I wanna do more than just get by like we've been doing.

WOODBURN
I've got money put away--enough for us to live on for a while if we had to.

WENDY
But I wanna be able to take trips and buy-

WOODBURN
Earn it some other way.

WENDY
This way's quick and easy.

No words come from Woodburn as he rises from the bench, turns away from Wendy, and walks to the barbell. From each end, he removes a spring-clip fastener.

WENDY (CONT'D)
So that's it then...?

Woodburn claims two twenty-five pound weights from a stack and slides them onto the barbell. Iron SCRAPES and CLANKS, and fasteners CLICK into place.

WOODBURN
I know my limits.

The strongman sets his feet, takes a deep breath, and applies his fists to the barbell.

Frustrated and SNIFFLING, the blonde walks away from the metal shack. Her sandals SCUFF the grit as she vanishes.

Woodburn tenses his legs, raises the barbell from the ground, and GRUNTS.

INT. CIRCUS TENT - TWENTY-FIVE MINUTES LATER

GROWLING, the strongman pulls at the ends of a thick industrial crowbar while he pushes against its middle with his forehead. His body is clothed in a pair of cut-off jeans, an undershirt, sneakers, and a heavy chain that thrice encircles his waist.

The big top spotlight gleams upon his bulging biceps, triceps, forearms, chest, and neck as he strains against the obstinate iron. At present, the crowbar CREAKS. This sound elicits MURMURS from the attentive crowd.

GROWLING, Woodburn hitches his shoulders, reapplies his fists, and presses his head against the iron. The crowbar CREAKS, and the shaft bows. Startled GASPS and MURMURS ripple through the crowd.

A small amount of blood runs from the point at which the iron presses into his forehead. This crimson streak runs into his eyebrow and drips onto his cheek.

ROARING, the strongman reapplies his strength and bends the crowbar into a 'U' against his skull. A cymbal CRASHES. APPLAUSE rips through the crowd.

Joylessly, Woodburn tosses the bent tool onto the ground, where it THUDS, and turns away from the audience. His eyes flicker to the dark opening in the back of the tent, beyond which stands the military clown, Laughy. At present, the comedian holds up one index finger.

The strongman walks to a shipping trunk, reaches inside, and withdraws a large stainless steel toaster. This appliance he lets fall to the ground, where it CLANKS.

Woodburn looks at the warped reflection of his face in the upturned side of the toaster. Noisy and unpleasant thoughts crowd into his mind, and he shoves them away as he steps on top of the appliance. The stainless steel cube fully supports his weight.

At present, the strongman jumps into the air and lands on the toaster. The well-built appliance maintains its integrity.

Woodburn returns to the dirt, picks up the toaster, and presses the palms of his hands against its sides. His feet set as his shoulders stiffen.

A DRUMROLL echoes. Tendons snap taut, and muscles bulge as the strongman presses against the ends of the appliance. A stainless steel reflection of his face warps on the surface.

Woodburn hitches his shoulders, GROWLS, and reapplies his strength. Metal CLANKS. A drop of blood DRIPS from his cut forehead onto the appliance. The DRUMROLL continues.

ROARING, the strongman forces his hands together. Metal CLANKS, and the toaster abruptly CRUMPLES.

A cymbal CRASHES, and the audience APPLAUDS.

Woodburn tosses aside the toaster, which CLANKS against the bent crowbar and bounces next to a few broken cinder blocks that were used in an earlier part of his routine. At present, the Ringmaster returns to the spotlight and gestures.

RINGMASTER
Ladies, gentlemen, and miscellaneous others... Please show your appreciation for this middle marker on the continuum of human evolution, Chad the Strongman.

A SLOW, DEEP TRUMPET MELODY plays. The crowd APPLAUDS as Woodburn turns away and walks toward the exit. His face is grim, and his thoughts are elsewhere.

Sitting in the fifth row, Suzie draws from the whisky flask and hands the dwindling remainder to Robert. Both teenagers are red-faced from their illicit drinking.

RINGMASTER (CONT'D)
Rather than contend with knives or lions or cinder blocks, our next performers have chosen a very different type of antagonist--a foe that each and every one of us battles daily.

The lights darken, and a grand TRUMPET FANFARE echoes.

RINGMASTER (CONT'D)
This daring duo are named the Fearless Ritornellis, and their opponent...is gravity!

A spotlight shines on the good-looking, athletic duo that stands fifty-five feet above a safety net on a tightrope perch. BENIAMO and GRAZIA RITORNELLI wear silver and purple leotards and keep their long black hair tied back in tight ponytails. A cymbal CRASHES, and the prompted audience APPLAUDS this Italian act. PEPPY ACCORDION MUSIC fills the big top.

In the fifth row, Robert slips his hand into the back of Suzie's pants and grabs some flesh. Somebody TAPS the skinny fellow's right shoulder, and he turns around.

In the sixth row sits a BURLY GUY of forty-three, whose disapproving frown is duplicated on the face of his thick WIFE. Between this pair sit two curious GIRLS, aged five and seven. At present, the irritated father points to the skinny fellow's groping hand.

BURLY GUY
You doing that isn't appropriate in front of kids.

Suzie withdraws the salacious hand from her jeans as Robert contemplates witty responses to launch at the Burly Guy.

ROBERT
Mind your own fucking business.

BURLY GUY
And now you've used bad language in front of my girls.

Coolly, the father starts to unbutton his cuffs.

BURLY GUY (CONT'D)
In five I'll beat you unconscious.

Suzie rises from the bench and grabs Robert by the arm as the Burly Guy rolls up his left sleeve.

SUZIE
C'mon Robert.

BURLY GUY
Four.

The skinny fellow appraises his opponent, who has a sixty-pound weight advantage. Most of this discrepancy is muscle.

BURLY GUY (CONT'D)
Three.

The father rolls up his right sleeve.

SUZIE
C'mon, Robert.
(she pulls on his arm)
I need to use the bathroom anyways.

ROBERT
Well since you need to go...

Robert rises to his feet, teeters drunkenly, and follows Suzie along the row toward the aisle. Embarrassed by his flight, the skinny fellow broods. His left foot catches upon the leg of a BLACK TEEN, and he stumbles.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Outta my way, coon.

The Black Teen flings a middle finger. Before Robert can respond, Suzie pulls him into the aisle. A DRUMROLL echoes.

SUZIE
C'mon--I need to go. When we come back, we'll sit someplace else.

ROBERT
Fuck this circus. Let's go park somewhere.

The drunken teenagers walk down the steps, which present more problems for them than the tightrope does for Grazia Ritornelli, who is currently walking backwards across the wire towards the open arms of Beniamo.

INT. BLUE CONVERTIBLE - FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER

Robert wipes his mouth, gets behind the wheel of a messy blue convertible, and garners a skeptical look from Suzie, who occupies the stained passenger's seat.

SUZIE
You sure you can drive?

ROBERT
I barfed everything I drank.

The skinny fellow stabs the key at the ignition, misses, and finds the opening on his second attempt.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
I'm regular now.

The drunken blonde does not look convinced.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
I'll gargle some mouthwash when we park. Don't worry.

Robert twists the key as Suzie buckles up. The engine CHITTERS and RUMBLES.

At present, the skinny fellow toggles the gear into reverse and backs his convertible from the space. A car HONKS, and Robert STOMPS the brakes.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Asshole!

The other vehicle rolls past. Robert backs his convertible out of the space and cuts the wheel. His bumper SCRAPES a six-inch line upon the side of a neighboring sedan.

EXT. CIRCUS MIDWAY - TWENTY MINUTES LATER

The show has just ended. Spectators file out of the circus tent onto the midway, which is lighted by two strings of hanging bulbs. The septuagenarian Dirty Rita handles the 'Young & Naked Chicks' game booth in her bustier, while the fat man Barrel runs the food concession with the help of Harry the Human Crab and a BEARDED LADY.

Outside of the sideshow tent, two Mexican Crewmen raise a banner that is illustrated with the silhouettes of three naked woman. Above these lurid figures is the proclamation, 'Live Girls! Adults Only!!!'

Laughy stands beside the entrance of this altered venue in his green clown attire, army helmet, and makeup. Held in each of his hands is a starter pistol.

LAUGHY
Attention!

Aiming upward, the comedian fires a starter pistol, which POPS. Startled passersby glance over, and a few people pause to listen.

LAUGHY (CONT'D)
There aren't words good enough to describe the gorgeous girls in this show, but I'll do my best. They've got-

One gun POPS.

LAUGHY (CONT'D)
They've got-

The other gun POPS.

LAUGHY (CONT'D)
And every single one of 'em has a beautiful set of-

A POP is followed by another POP. Laughy pockets the starter guns, raises a plastic rifle, and squirts a stream of water over the crowd.

LAUGHY (CONT'D)
If I need to explain this part, you're not old enough to enter.

The major part of the crowd continues toward the parking lot, but the number of people who watch the clown has tripled.

INT. LEAN-TO AT THE BACK OF THE SIDESHOW TENT - SAME

Standing in a lamplit lean-to that is attached to the sideshow stage are Wendy, a redheaded dancer who is named CLEMENTINE, and her black contemporary, CARAMEL. The nervous blonde arranges iridescent lingerie atop her brassiere.

LAUGHY (O.S.)
But if you don't think you can handle this mission...or if your wife has a different assignment for you--like taking out the trash or digging latrines--then think no more of the carnal delights that're inside.

Clementine walks toward Wendy and extends her right hand. Upon her upturned palm lie two small white pills.

WENDY
What are they?

CLEMENTINE
Help.

WENDY
The only drugs I take are sleeping pills, and sometimes a little weed at concerts.

CARAMEL
Don't get uppity.

Unseen men HOOT as Wendy reluctantly takes the pills.

LAUGHY
All right soldiers, forward march!

INT. WOODBURN'S MOTORHOME - TWO HOURS LATER

Dressed again in the white coat, Wendy enters the motorhome and turns on a light. Beige rugs cover the floor of the main living area, and all of the side windows have tan curtains. Speakers and a black-and-white television sit in a mounted recreational unit opposite a half-sized refrigerator and a small stove. Lying in a sleeping bag on the floor in farthest corner is Woodburn.

WENDY
Chad?

The strongman GRUNTS in reply, but does not open his eyes.

WENDY (CONT'D)
Can I stay here tonight? Till I pack my stuff?

WOODBURN
Take the bed.

WENDY
Thanks.

Wendy shuts the door and turns the bolt, which SNAPS. Her tired face evinces some doubts about what she has just done, but she does not voice these feelings aloud. At present, she raises her hands, smells her skin, and wrinkles her mouth.

WENDY (CONT'D)
Is it okay if I take a shower?

Eyes closed, Woodburn nods his head.

WOODBURN
Be sure to put something on before you come out.

WENDY
I will.

With misgivings, Wendy turns away and walks toward the small shower compartment. Woodburn rolls onto his side and faces the opposite direction.

WENDY (CONT'D)
I didn't do anything but dance and take off my top. Nobody touched me.

No response comes from the strongman.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - NIGHT

Awash with moonlight are a mountain range, a winding road, and a mangled guardrail. Black skid marks lead from the pavement through this burst boundary.

Ninety feet below and at the bottom of the steep hillside lies the blue convertible, which is now overturned. Smoke rises from its exposed undercarriage, though most of the flames have gone out. Trapped within the wrecked vehicle are its two dead occupants--Suzie, whose face is mashed against the shattered glass, and Robert, whose neck is broken. Flies crawl upon their soiled jeans.

EXT. COPSE - NIGHT

A hot wind BLOWS. Somewhere in the distance, a huge fire ROARS and casts pulsating red and orange light into the copse of bald cypress trees.

Crawling upon the ground with his pants down and covered with grit is a CRYING MAN. His breathing is erratic, and his body shakes as he holds his broken ribs. Tears drip from his filthy face.

Burned on one side, battered, and bloody, Woodburn follows behind the Crying Man. Held in each of the strongman's rigid hands is a cinder block.

CRYING MAN
Please...d-d-don't kill me.

Woodburn raises his arms, and the cinder blocks lift into the sky. His shoulder muscles and triceps knot when the concrete units are poised directly overhead. Eyes cold with fury, the strongman whips his hands down.

The Crying Man YELLS as cinder blocks speed toward each side of his head.

INT. WOODBURN'S MOTORHOME - DAWN

Woodburn flinches awake in his sleeping bag. Sweat drips from his face, and his heart THUDS as he looks around. Very little sunshine enters the curtained motorhome, where Wendy dozes on a sofa bed under a tangled tan blanket.

Gravel CRACKLES as vehicles roll onto the circus campgrounds.

Sitting up, Woodburn looks at a side window. Red and blue lights glare at the edges of the curtain.

The strongman climbs from his sleeping bag in nothing but navy boxer shorts, walks to the window, and peers outside. Red and blue lights flash across his face.

WENDY
What's going on?

WOODBURN
Not sure.

The blond dancer rolls onto her back and sits up while the strongman pulls on jeans and a white undershirt.

WENDY
You don't have to sleep on the floor when you get back.

There is an implication in this invitation that causes Woodburn to frown. YAWNING, Wendy pulls a fallen nightgown strap over her left shoulder.

The strongman walks to the door, stops, and undoes the bolt.

WOODBURN
If you're done sleeping, start packing.

EXT. CAMPGROUNDS BEHIND THE CIRCUS TENT - SAME

Two idling police cars RUMBLE outside of the brown and tan motorhome that belongs to Woodburn, who is currently walking down the steps toward the gravel. Sitting in the nearer vehicle are SHERIFF WELLFORD, a bulky law enforcer of fifty who wears mirrored sunglasses, and his lank underling, DEPUTY GREG, who has the wheel in his hands and a narrow face. Neither man looks friendly, nor do the two tired POLICE OFFICERS who occupy the second cruiser.

Deputy Greg rolls down his window, leans his head outside, and eyes Woodburn, who is thirty feet off.

DEPUTY GREG
Where's the man in charge? Harrington?

WOODBURN
Why're you asking?

DEPUTY GREG
Sheriff Wellford wants to talk to him.

WOODBURN
About what?

DEPUTY GREG
Police business.

Woodburn glances at Sheriff Wellford, who returns his gaze inscrutably from the passenger seat.

WOODBURN
What kind of police business?

DEPUTY GREG
Ask another question and we'll slap you with obstruction.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
Don't bother him.

Deputy Greg and Sheriff Wellford turn their heads to face the diminutive boss, Nickel, who wears a maroon robe and matching slippers as he exits his large white motorhome. His hair is slick, and his demeanor is calm.

NICKEL
Strongmen aren't great conversationalists.

SHERIFF WELLFORD
Harrington. Come over here.

Nickel appraises the unkind faces of the law enforcers, glances at Woodburn, and walks toward the nearer police vehicle.

Deputy Greg drinks coffee from an orange paper cup as Sheriff Wellford removes his mirrored sunglasses and wipes them clean with a handkerchief.

NICKEL
What's the reason for this visit?

The superior replaces the sunglasses upon his face, and the diminutive boss looks at two convex reflections of himself.

SHERIFF WELLFORD
Last night, two kids--sixteen year olds--got drunk here.

NICKEL
We don't serve alcohol to kids.

SHERIFF WELLFORD
They might've snuck it in, but it doesn't matter. You're responsible for what goes on at your show.

Sheriff Wellford stares at Nickel, who neither confirms nor denies this statement.

SHERIFF WELLFORD (CONT'D)
These two kids got in a convertible and drove off a mountain.
Both of them died.

The diminutive boss frowns with irritation.

NICKEL
That's sad.

SHERIFF WELLFORD
It is. And there's a trick ending to this sad story. The girl in that wreck was the governor's daughter.

Nickel stares at reflections of his stunned face in Sheriff Wellford's sunglasses while Deputy Greg SIPS a quarter teaspoon of coffee.

SHERIFF WELLFORD (CONT'D)
We can't have you here anymore.
Pull up your stakes, roll up your tents, and drive off until you're in another state.

NICKEL
Our next three set-ups are in Wisconsin.

SHERIFF WELLFORD
Not any longer.

Sheriff Wellford motions to Deputy Greg, who nods obediently. Gravel CRACKLES underneath the cruisers as they pull away.

NICKEL
Rat shit.

Woodburn watches Nickel ponder the bad situation while the cars traverse the camp in a haze of luminous dust.

NICKEL (CONT'D)
Laughy.

From the camouflage pop-up tent that is next to the white motorhome emerges Laughy, whose tired eyes are bloodshot. Smears of makeup stain his sixty-two year-old face, which is discolored by numerous burn scars.

LAUGHY
Boss?

NICKEL
We're yanking stakes.

LAUGHY
Where're we sticking?

NICKEL
Northern Louisiana.

Woodburn grimaces and glances at Laughy, who is similarly unhappy with this destination.

LAUGHY
Boss...I toured there when I was with Clyde's--and that was the end of Clyde's.

NICKEL
All the good spots are booked up this far in the season, and I still owe money on that new big rig.
(he thinks)
Cut down the crewmen--all the whites and most of the blacks. Keep the Mexicans. We're leaving today.

INT. WOODBURN'S MOTORHOME - DUSK

Gripping the steering wheel, Woodburn drives his brown and tan motorhome south on the highway behind an aquamarine trailer that is part of the long circus caravan. Harry the Human Crab, Young Mountain (the Native American knife thrower), and a fifty-year-old fellow who has long silver hair, dangerous eyebrows, and the nickname MAESTRO sit at a table and play cards. The target girl Paloma lies on the sofa, where she reads a romance novel.

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB
Woodburn.

WOODBURN
Yeah?

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB
I saw Wendy putting boxes in Caramel's trailer. You two are through?

WOODBURN
Yep.

Woodburn pushes a button, and headlights shine upon the aquamarine trailer. Harry the Human Crab SNIFFS the air.

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB
This place still smells like her.

WOODBURN
She broke a bottle of perfume when she was packing.

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB
You two seemed good together.

No reply comes from Woodburn. Young Mountain points at the cards that are in Harry the Human Crab's two-fingered hands.

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
It's your turn.

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB
I'm contemplating my options.

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
Do it silently.

The anomalous performer frowns at the knife thrower and continues to ruminate.

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB
Those long legs of hers...I could kiss those things forever.

WOODBURN
They'll probably be on sale in a week or two.

This comment garners uncomfortable looks from Young Mountain and the rest of the group, but nobody says anything in response. Wanting to change the subject, Paloma puts down her book and leans toward Woodburn.

PALOMA
What's the name of this place we're going?

WOODBURN
Pinebranch.

PALOMA
I've never heard of it.

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB
Nobody has.

Something occurs to Young Mountain, who then turns in his seat to face Woodburn.

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
Didn't you grow up in Louisiana?

WOODBURN
Yeah. Right where we're going.

Everybody in the motorhome looks at the strongman.

PALOMA
What's it like?

WOODBURN
What you're expecting, but worse.

PALOMA
When was the last time you visited?

WOODBURN
I've never visited.

This statement thickens the air. Preoccupied, Woodburn adjusts the wheel with his hard fists.

PALOMA
Have you got any family down there?

WOODBURN
I don't know.

Young Mountain shakes his head 'no' to Paloma, who refrains from asking any more questions.

Unwanted memories trouble Woodburn, who leans over, opens the glove compartment, and withdraws an 8-track cassette. The tape CLICKS into the player, and he SNAPS the 'Play' button. CLASSICAL PIANO MUSIC emerges from the speakers.

Surprised by this selection, the long-haired musician who goes by the name Maestro looks at Woodburn.

MAESTRO
Do you like Chopin?

WOODBURN
That's who's playing piano on this?

MAESTRO
Chopin is the name of the composer who wrote this music. Do you like it?

WOODBURN
Not sure, but it helps me relax. Found it in suitcase I bought at a yard sale a few years ago.
(he listens to the music)
It's reminds me of the tide coming across the beach or something.

The strongman looks beyond the aquamarine trailer to the southern horizon, which is turning black.

WOODBURN (CONT'D)
Helps clears things away.

EXT. STATE LINE UPON THE INTERSTATE - 5:10 AM

Headlights from a southbound eighteen wheeler glare upon a sign that reads, 'Welcome to the State of Louisiana'. This RUMBLING vehicle leads the circus caravan across the line.

INT. WOODBURN'S MOTORHOME - 5:46 AM

The lights are out in the motorhome, and the dashboard clock reads 5:46 AM. Young Mountain, Paloma, Harry the Human Crab, and Maestro sleep on furniture and in bags while Woodburn ZIPS up his pants, sets a plastic bottle of urine in a cup holder, and withdraws a thermos of coffee from the adjacent slot. A red light flickers on and off upon his face.

The strongman notches his own turn signal, which CLICKS continually, and then slows his motorhome so that fifty feet lie between his vehicle and the aquamarine trailer.

Headlights illuminate an off ramp as the foremost big rig turns to the right. Its sibling exits as do succeeding cars, trailers, and motorhomes.

Woodburn dials the wheel of his vehicle clockwise and follows the caravan off of the interstate. Headlights flash upon a sign that reads, 'Exit 112C Pinebranch.'

The strongman's face hardens upon seeing this name from his past. His fists right the wheel, and his turn signal and that of the preceding vehicle go dark. Night returns to the cab of the motorhome. Weak moonlight shines upon the bald cypress copses that line either side of the road.

INT. WOODBURN'S MOTORHOME - TEN MINUTES LATER

Ten minutes have passed. A red taillight flashes once again upon the strongman, and he notches his turn signal. Ahead of him, the aquamarine trailer corners to the left and bounces.

Motorhome tires THUD across the same dip. A fog of illuminated dirt obscures Woodburn's view of the aquamarine trailer as his vehicle tilts forward and rolls down a bumpy incline. Urine shakes in the sealed bottle that is nestled in the cup holder.

The preceding vehicle draws nearer, and the strongman steps on the brakes to maintain his distance. Again, tires THUD.

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB
Hey asshole--we're trying to sleep.

EXT. OPEN FIELD - SAME

The eastern sky is starting to glow, and the stars are gone. Weeds HISS and CRACKLE under the dusty automobiles that currently roll into a vast open field. A lake borders the south and east sides of this three-hundred acre property, and the town of Pinebranch lies directly to the west.

INT. WOODBURN'S MOTORHOME - SAME

Woodburn brakes until his motorhome comes to a complete stop. His right hand flings the gear into park. Headlights of the neighboring vehicles turn off one by one as he withdraws his keys, rises from his seat, and arches his back. His jaw tightens. Joints CRACK as he stretches his arms up.

EXT. OPEN FIELD - MORNING

Woodburn brings a sledgehammer down toward a stake, which is held in place by Young Mountain. Metals CLANK, and the spike bites into the earth. Only three hours have passed since the caravan arrived in the field, but dirt already colors the jeans and undershirts that these two coworkers wear. The rising sun glares in the strongman's eyes, and sweat drips down his brow as the knife thrower adjusts the stake. A GRUNT sounds, and again, the sledgehammer falls. Metals CLANK.

Near this pair are two Crewmen who work in concert with a bulky machine that is a stake driver. The holder is a lanky black man of twenty, and a squat mustached Mexican who is twice his age is the operator. A CLINKING TATTOO sounds as the heavy tool jackhammers a stake into the earth. Three hundred feet away, two hearty Mexican Crewmen drive spikes by hand. CLANKS, CLINKING TATTOOS, and GRUNTS echo.

Laughy, two senior Crewmen, and Johnson walk toward the back of the red eighteen wheeler. Frowning, the lion tamer shakes his head.

JOHNSON
There's nothing in my contract about having to help put up the tent.

The clown withdraws a JINGLING key ring and opens a large industrial padlock.

LAUGHY
The boss is overextended right now. We're all doing extra.

JOHNSON
It's ridiculous.

CLINKS and CLANKS echo as stakes are driven down. Laughy takes the padlock from the latch and puts it on the tailgate.

JOHNSON (CONT'D)
And to set up for a place like this-

Johnson gestures toward the flat, weathered, and wholly unspectacular town that lies to the west.

LAUGHY
I'm twice as old as you and not complaining.

JOHNSON
You put on make-up and shoot squirt guns. If you make a mistake, people clap.
I've got three lions to care for and keep disciplined. If that relationship isn't what it should be, I'm a dead chew toy.

No response comes from the clown, who heaves the rear door into the roof. Filling the back of the big rig are poles and giant bundles of tent canvas.

Laughy climbs onto the tailgate, withdraws a squirt gun, and shoots Johnson in the face.

LAUGHY
Button up that complain-hole.

The Crewmen grin and climb into truck. Johnson smiles despite himself and enters soon after. Laughy seizes a strap that holds a canvas bundle in place and starts to undo the knot.

Woodburn looks at the aquamarine trailer while Young Mountain retrieves more stakes. Standing at the door of this mobile home and KNOCKING is the fat man Barrel.

BARREL
Girls?

CARAMEL (O.S.)
Yeah...?

BARREL
I need some help making chow.

CARAMEL (O.S.)
Comin’.

The fat man turns away and ambles toward a refrigerated truck. From out of the aquamarine trailer walk Clementine (the redheaded dancer), Caramel (her black peer), and Wendy. All three women are wearing jeans, t-shirts, and sandals.

Wendy notices Woodburn, who then turns his gaze to an upheld stake and swings his sledgehammer. Metals CLANK. Two bright sparks shoot past Young Mountain’s face, and a piece of chipped metal lands in the grass.

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
Easy.

EXT. MAIN AVENUE / DOWNTOWN PINEBRANCH - 11:50 AM

The rising sun glares in an empty sky. Cars and pickup trucks roll along Main Avenue, the two-way road that runs through the exact middle of Pinebranch. Pawnshops, pool halls, bars, 99 cent stores, and a couple of greasy spoons line this street as do more than a dozen abandoned storefronts. A HOMELESS VETERAN in a wheelchair begs for change at an intersection, and a crew of MALE DELINQUENTS diminish cigarettes while inspecting the bodies of cars and WOMEN.

INT. #1 BEST DINER - SAME

RHYTHM & BLUES MUSIC plays in a half-filled diner that has beige linoleum tiles and orange booths. Occupying stools at a counter that faces the grill, griddle, and fryer are two men in tan police uniforms. A stocky thirty-two year-old named DEPUTY THATCHER who has thick arms and a square head sits next SHERIFF JORGENSON, a leather-skinned blond man of fifty-three who is six foot five inches tall. Their plates are empty but for one pickle, and their coffees are memories.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Let’s palaver with these entertainers.

Deputy Thatcher nods his head, claims the pickle from Sheriff Jorgenson’s plate, inserts the whole thing into his mouth, CRUNCHES zestfully, and wipes his fingertips on a napkin.

A tiny gray-haired black woman in an apron who is named JASMINE brings a coffee pot toward the seated law enforcers.

JASMINE
(Georgia accent)
Freshly brewed for y’all.

Sheriff Jorgenson holds up a hand.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
No thank you, ma'am--we're exiting.
(to the deputy)
You'll get it next time.

The stocky fellow nods his head as the tall lawman withdraws his wallet. Alarmed, the proprietress who is her own griddle cook and waitress shakes her head back and forth.

JASMINE
Put that wallet away right now.
I wanna thank you fellas proper for
throwing out them kids yesterday.

Sheriff Jorgenson sets a ten dollar bill, a five, and three ones upon the counter.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
You're welcome.

JASMINE
I ain't taking your money.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
We don't make a bundle, but we make
enough for coffee and BLTs.

The law enforcers rise from their stools and claim their tan hats from the counter.

JASMINE
You fellas visiting that circus
that's setting up?

SHERIFF JORGENSON
We are.

Deputy Thatcher opens the door (which JINGLES) as Sheriff Jorgenson waves at Jasmine and exits the diner. The stocky fellow starts follows after his superior.

JASMINE
Recommend this place to them if
they've got shoes and've showered.

DEPUTY THATCHER
Bigot.

INT. PATROL CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Deputy Thatcher climbs behind the wheel of the patrol car as Sheriff Jorgenson folds his six feet and five inches into the passenger seat. Doors shut, and the engine RUMBLES to life. The stocky fellow glances at his mirrors, flings a blinker, and drives the cruiser onto the road.

DEPUTY THATCHER
Are you’re expecting trouble from these circus people?

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Normal folks don’t walk high wires or play checkers with lions, but that doesn’t mean they’re criminals.
Let’s just see how they are.

A light turns red, and Deputy Thatcher stops the patrol car. On the west side of the street and leaning against an abandoned store is a bearded and uniformed twenty-three year-old homeless veteran who is named RALPH.

DEPUTY THATCHER
My youngest brother used to play little league with him.
(he shakes his head)
Glad the war’s ended.

Sheriff Jorgenson nods his head. The light changes to green, and Deputy Thatcher accelerates through the intersection.

EXT. OPEN FIELD - SAME

The midday sun glares on the expanding campsite. Hundreds of stakes have been driven into the ground by Woodburn, Young Mountain, and the Crewmen. Wendy, Caramel, and Clementine grill hamburgers and hot dogs while Barrel mixes a massive bowl of potato salad in the newly erected concession stand. Laughy, Johnson, and two Crewmen unroll vast amounts of canvas. Maestro, the Bearded Lady, and the Ringmaster organize the sideshow tent. Dirty Rita, Paloma, and Harry the Human Crab POUND nails into the planks of the ‘Young & Naked Chicks’ booth. Watching all this activity from a coop and CHIRPING are the nude chicks.

Dressed in dirty jeans and a sweaty undershirt, Nickel climbs up three steps and KNOCKS on a trailer door that has the gilded name, ‘The Fearless Ritornellis’. Beniamo opens the door of the air conditioned mobile home and fastens the belt of his black silk robe.

NICKEL
You’re fired.

Stunned, the pony-tailed tightrope walker gapes. The diminutive boss turns around and proceeds down the steps.

BENIAMO
(thick Italian accent)
Prego, Signore, please. Wait. Wait.

Nickel stops walking and looks back.

NICKEL
You wanna fuck your cousin in a trailer all day, go to Hollywood.

BENIAMO
Signore...prego...Grazia and I...we-we have no experience building--

NICKEL
I'm working. The fat man who's had three bypasses is working. So are a cripple with no legs and a woman who's a thousand years old. You wanna get un-fired, help.

The diminutive boss turns away from the Italian and departs.

DIRTY RITA
(calling out)
I'm only seventy-nine!

Nickel walks towards the far side of the camp, where Maestro and the Ringmaster are currently arranging the sideshow tent. At present, the long-haired musician notices something in the distance, raises his trumpet, and plays a CAVALRY CALL.

NICKEL
Rat shit.

Heads turn to face the dirt road, where a small speck that is an approaching police car trails a plume of grit. Again, Maestro plays the CAVALRY CALL.

NICKEL (CONT'D)
Everybody keep working.
(he looks around)
Laughy!

Laughy is already jogging toward Nickel.

NICKEL (CONT'D)
Grab my special briefcase.

LAUGHY
Will do.

Three hundred feet up the road, rocks and grit CRACKLE underneath the tires of the patrol car, which has a tan top and a green bottom. Woodburn, Young Mountain, Wendy, Harry the Human Crab, Barrel, Dirty Rita, Paloma, and others skeptically eye this approaching vehicle.

Nickel puts on sunglasses and arrives at the edge of the dirt road as Laughy emerges from the white trailer with a heavy black briefcase. Twenty hasty strides bring the clown alongside his diminutive boss.

INT. PATROL CAR - SAME

Deputy Thatcher drives Sheriff Jorgenson east along the dirt road toward the midget in sunglasses and his companion, who has a burn-scarred face, filthy overalls, and a briefcase.

DEPUTY THATCHER
And you thought they wouldn't be normal.

EXT. OPEN FIELD - SAME

Woodburn looks away from the police car and swings his sledgehammer at the upheld stake. Metals CLANK, and sparks shoot past Young Mountain's head.

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
Easy.

The cruiser stops, and its engine dies. Two doors open. From out of the vehicle stride Deputy Thatcher and Sheriff Jorgenson, both of whom eye Nickel from under the shadowy brims of their hats.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Good afternoon.

NICKEL
Howdy officers.

The tall lawman and stocky fellow continue toward the diminutive boss.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
You sound a bit New York for a 'Howdy.'

NICKEL
Whenever I travel to a foreign country, I try to learn the lingo.

Sheriff Jorgenson admits a brief grin as he and Deputy Thatcher reach Nickel. The diminutive boss tilts his head back and looks at the foremost lawman, who is nearly twice his height.

LAUGHY
It's a comedy act in the making.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
I'm Sheriff Jorgenson.

Extended hands of very different sizes clasp and shake.

NICKEL
Nickel Harrington. Owner.

Sheriff Jorgenson withdraws his hand as he and his stocky subordinate appraise the circus folks.

Sledgehammers CLANK against stakes, and SMACKED nails bite into wooden beams; dozens of furtive eyes flicker toward the visitors, but do not linger. Woodburn and Young Mountain quickly stand out to the lawmen as the most formidable members of this group.

DEPUTY THATCHER
Sounds like a chain-gang.

Metals CLANKS, and hammers SMACK nails. Sheriff Jorgenson returns his gaze to Nickel, who does not say anything. Each man silently tests the other for a moment.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
The mayor called yesterday--told me about you folks coming out here to set up.

The diminutive boss nods his head, but says nothing.

SHERIFF JORGENSON (CONT'D)
Could a man bring his wife and daughter to this show of yours?

NICKEL
The big top's clean. All ages. The sideshow is good for older kids, and the tease act is for adults.

No expression shows on the leathery face of the tall lawman.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
You've got somebody making sure that kids don't sneak into this tease act?

NICKEL
Certainly.

LAUGHY
And I'm armed.

Laughy raises a cherry red squirt gun.

Metals CLANK. Sheriff Jorgenson eyes the laboring circus folk and keeps his gaze upon them while he speaks.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
When a circus comes to town, there's usually some advance notice. Flyers. Ads in the paper. Maybe even a commercial on local TV or a piece in the news.

The tall lawman returns his gaze to the diminutive boss. No reply comes from the latter fellow.

SHERIFF JORGENSON (CONT'D)
Where was your last set up?

NICKEL
Wisconsin.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
And now you're in Louisiana.

NICKEL
That's the geography.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Did something happen in Wisconsin that prematurely ended your engagement there?

NICKEL
We got sick of the cheese.

Metals CLANK, and hammers SMACK nails while Sheriff Jorgenson scrutinizes Nickel.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
We don't wanna give you a hard time, but we need to know why you're in Pinebranch.

NICKEL
A kid snuck some booze into the circus, got drunk, and wrecked his daddy's car. His passenger was part of an important Wisconsin family. The local police advised us to go.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
These kids were killed?

NICKEL
If there were a prosecutable case against us, we'd be in a Wisconsin court, not a Louisiana field.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
That's not what I asked.

NICKEL
They died.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Is alcohol a problem at your shows?

NICKEL
No. We just serve beer. And we cut off any guy who starts acting like a hemorrhoid.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
What's in that briefcase?

Nickel nods his head, and Laughy CLICKS two brass latches. Buckled into a padded compartment within the briefcase is a reel-to-reel tape recorder, the wheels of which are currently turning.

SHERIFF JORGENSON (CONT'D)
You've experienced a lot of shakedowns from policemen?

NICKEL
It wasn't in case you guys started singing opera.

Deputy Thatcher frowns, but does not say anything.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Good luck with your show.

NICKEL
Thanks.

The tall lawman and his stocky subordinate glance once more at the strongman, turn away, and stride toward the cruiser.

Woodburn chews some unhappy memories and swings his sledgehammer, which CLANKS against the stake. Sparks fly.

EXT. NASCENT CIRCUS GROUNDS IN THE OPEN FIELDS - LATE DAY

The sun is starting to sink in the western sky. Part of the open field has been transformed into a midway, and another portion has become a rough encampment in which many of the caravan vehicles have been parked. Lying across the grass in the middle of a circle that is comprised of numerous stakes and side posts is the central support for the circus tent--the king's pole.

A semi tractor that is being driven by Laughy RUMBLES, and eight metal lines SNAP taut. Pulled by these guide wires, one end of the king's pole begins to rise. Standing at the base of this shaft and guiding its bottom toward an open hole are Woodburn, Young Mountain, and three Crewman.

Laughy checks his mirrors and accelerates. RUMBLING, the semi tractor pulls the central pillar upright. Woodburn, Young Mountain, and the Crewmen set the bottom of the shaft into the hole, where it THUDS in place. At present, the quintet heaps sandbags around the base.

Dirty Rita eyes the eight-five foot king's pole and exhales cigarette smoke.

DIRTY RITA
I've seen bigger.

INT. CIRCUS TENT - TWENTY MINUTES LATER

Woodburn, Young Mountain, Johnson (the lion tamer), Beniamo Ritornelli, and four Crewmen grip the eight lines that run along the king's pole up to suspended winches. The men heave their ropes one full yard, and the top of the circus tent rises that same amount into the sky.

EXT. CAMPGROUNDS BEHIND THE CIRCUS TENT - EARLY EVENING

Floodlights shine on Performers, Crewmen, and the array of trailers, motorhomes, and vehicles that lie behind the erected circus tent. At the eastern edge of this campground, Woodburn carries upon his head eight corrugated metal sheets, the edges of which he grips with his fists. His measured strides bring these heavy materials closer to the lake.

The strongman reaches a swath of dirt and heaves his burden, which then CLANKS upon the ground. Moonlight glimmers on his sweaty face as he returns to his motorhome, the back panel of which is open. Within this sizable compartment lie corrugated metal sheets, cinder blocks, and a weight set.

Woodburn passes by Nickel, who smokes a cigar, and a Laughy, who is half in uniform.

LAUGHY
Setting up a circus in twelve hours wasn't a good enough work out?

WOODBURN
Not for every muscle.

NICKEL
Woodburn's a professional.

INT. METAL SHACK / CIRCUS CAMPGROUND - FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER

The open-roofed metal shack has once more been erected. Lying on a bench of raw wood and cinder blocks within it is Woodburn, who GRUNTS and EXHALES as he raises three hundred and fifty pounds of iron from his chest. His bulging arms soon reach the limit of their extension.

The strongman INHALES as he returns the barbell to his chest. His eyelids grow heavy, and he YAWNS.

EXT. UNDERWATER - NIGHT

Burnt and battered, Woodburn finds himself in a dark underwater environment. His oxygen-deprived lungs sting as he swims through weeds and filth. Bubbles appear in front of him, but for some reason travel right to left across his field of view rather than upwards.

Suffocating, the strongman fights the burning pain that burgeons within his lungs.

His body convulses in an attempt to force filthy water into his system. Again, bubbles travel right to left in front of his eyes.

An idea occurs to Woodburn, who then turns his head to follow the spheres of oxygen. To his left lies the glimmering surface of the water--he has been swimming across rather than up. Properly oriented, the strongman starts to rise.

His arms work furiously while his system forces filth into his lungs. Up above, fiery red and yellow lights ripple on the surface.

INT. METAL SHACK / CIRCUS CAMPGROUND - FORTY MINUTES LATER

Woodburn draws in a deep breath. Wearing his cut-off jeans, steel chain, and undershirt, the strongman sleeps within his metal shack upon the workout bench. A wind-up alarm clock that has been repaired many times with duct tape sits on his chest. His stomach sinks as he EXHALES, and then rises when he INHALES. Mild APPLAUSE echoes like a dream.

The alarm clock RINGS. Woodburn opens his eyes, shuts off the device, sits upright, stretches his arms, and arches his back. Aching joins CRACKLE.

NICKEL (O.S.)
Woodburn.

WOODBURN
En route.

INT. CIRCUS TENT - TEN MINUTES LATER

A cymbal CRASHES. Discarded, a crowbar that has been twisted into the shape of a bow tie CLANGS upon the ground. Mild APPLAUSE dwindles as Woodburn turns from the ninety scattered LOCALS who people the tent. His strides carry himself and the manned spotlight past the Ringmaster and toward a chest-high pyramid of cinder blocks. The emcee gestures.

RINGMASTER
Each of these cinder blocks weighs thirty-three pounds.

TEENAGE HECKLER
Sure they do!

RINGMASTER
Would anybody in this audience like to come down here and disprove the veracity of my statement with his or her own muscles?

The Ringmaster turns his bright eyes to the Teenage Heckler, who does not say anything else. Gesturing broadly, the Englishmen addresses the crowd.

RINGMASTER (CONT'D)
And now ladies and gentlemen, our very own Chad the Strongman will show you the great American pastime as a Neanderthal man might have played it...

A DRUMROLL sounds. Woodburn claims a barbell and takes a cinder block from the tall pile. This concrete unit he flings directly up into the air.

His feet set, and his knees bend as the rising cinder block is overcome by gravity. Gripping the barbell like a baseball bat and facing away from the crowd, the strongman waits. The DRUMROLL continues.

The concrete unit falls. Muscles knot, and Woodburn swings. The barbell POUNDS the cinder block, which then CRACKS into big hunks and spinning shards.

A cymbal CRASHES, and some people CLAP.

The DRUMROLL resumes. Focused, Woodburn tosses a second cinder block into the air and then a third.

The former concrete unit reaches the apex of its flight and starts to fall. Again, the strongman waits while gripping the barbell like a baseball bat.

The DRUMROLL continues, and the third concrete unit starts to fall. Woodburn swings. The barbell POUNDS the second cinder block, which then CRACKS into two solid halves.

Repositioning, Woodburn eyes the next falling target and swings. The speeding barbell SHATTERS the spinning block into myriad flying bits.

A cymbal CRASHES, and people APPLAUD. Hecklers and a few DRUNKS offer half-hearted BOOS

Ignoring the Locals, Woodburn claims three cinder blocks from the pile, tosses them into the air one after the other, and grips the barbell with his hard fists. Muscles knot as he waits to destroy.

EXT. CAMPGROUNDS BEHIND THE CIRCUS TENT - TEN MINUTES LATER

Woodburn exits the lean-to while wiping his face with a towel. His eyes flicker to the area where most of the vehicles are parked. Standing there and talking to Dirty Rita and two Crewmen while smoking cigarettes are Clementine and Wendy, both of whom wear coats over their lingerie.

The strongman watches this group for a moment and then walks in different direction until he reaches an olive green tent.

WOODBURN
Is Young Mountain in there?

Something RUSTLES within the tent, the front of which then opens. The target girl Paloma sticks her head outside.

PALOMA
He just went to the-

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
Woodburn.

Woodburn turns to face Young Mountain, who is wearing a black shirt, jeans, and boots.

WOODBURN
Wanna grab a drink in town?

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
You know a place?

WOODBURN
I remember one, though I wasn't of age back then.

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
I'd enjoy some whisky.
(he faces the tent)
Paloma?

PALOMA
Too tired.

Turning away from the tent, the strongman and the knife thrower walk towards the town of Pinebranch, which glows dimly to the west.

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
Are you feeling nostalgic?

WOODBURN
For a good drink, but not for this place.

EXT. GAWKY'S ROCK BAR / MAIN AVENUE - THIRTY MINUTES LATER

Motorcycles, weathered sedans, and pickup trucks fill the parking lot that abuts Gawky's Rock Bar, a sizable and badly painted establishment with shattered windows that are held together by packing tape. Striding along Main Avenue toward this place are Woodburn and Young Mountain. The knife thrower drags on a diminishing cigarette and blows smoke.

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
This's the place?

WOODBURN
This's the building...though it used to be a honky-tonk called The Good Times Saloon.

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
It looks like the good times have ended.

INT. GAWKY'S ROCK BAR - SAME

MUSIC BLASTS as Woodburn and Young Mountain walk through the front door of Gawky's Rock Bar. A few eyeballs appraise these new arrivals, who are themselves looking around the dimly-lighted establishment. Most of the inhabitants are blue collar LOCALS, though some ROUGH GUYS control the two pool tables in the rear, and a group of long-haired ROCKERS inhabit a booth. Thick smoke is everywhere.

The duo from the circus walk to the counter and find a space at the corner. A skinny bartender of forty-eight in frayed denim who is named GAWKY gestures at the two new arrivals.

GAWKY
I'll be with you.

The strongman nods his head. Leaning back against the bar, he scans the smoky establishment.

WOODBURN
Not a lot of girls here...
Five to one if you count every single thing that shaves its legs.

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
You're hoping to find somebody?

WOODBURN
Depends.

Young Mountain appraises Woodburn for a moment and then returns his gaze to Gawky, who is currently pouring sloppy whisky shots for two GIGGLING GIRLS.

WOODBURN (CONT'D)
You were gonna say something.

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
If I wanted to say something, I would've said it. Let's just have a drink.

WOODBURN
You disapprove.

The knife thrower glances at the strongman and returns his attention to the lanky bartender.

WOODBURN (CONT'D)
Spill it.

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
You're still in love with Wendy.

WOODBURN
Taking a stranger to bed is a pretty good antidote.

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
Not all women who do strip acts turn into prostitutes.

WOODBURN
One I was engaged to did--and two others I knew--so I'm not inclined to gamble that wager.
(he shakes his head)
It's important I avoid situations that'll get me upset.

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
You haven't lost it in a long time.

WOODBURN
Yeah--and doing what I do for a living helps--but that anger's always there, waiting to come out.
(he shakes his head)
Thinking about Wendy doing a tease act, night after night, and the other things that she might do... It's like throwing lit matches at dynamite.

For a moment, the knife thrower contemplates further voicing his thoughts aloud.

WOODBURN (CONT'D)
What?

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
You didn't know this, but Paloma stripped for a season when we were with the Talbot Brothers. She took off her clothes--all of them--but she never did anything more.

WOODBURN
If that's so, then she's the exception.

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
I don't want to argue with you. Let's just have a-

WOODBURN
Make your point, red skin.

Irritation shows on the face of the strongman, but is not reflected in the calm eyes of the knife thrower.

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
Wendy doesn't feel good about doing what she's doing, and you breaking things off with her at the same time will make her feel lower--cheaper--than she already does. You rejecting her now makes it more likely that she will become exactly what you said she would become.

Anger shines in Woodburn's eyes.

WOODBURN
Are you finished dispensing all your Indian wisdom?

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
You asked.

WOODBURN
'Cause you gave me that look.

The strongman waves at the bartender, who is currently tossing a whisky bottle into the trash.

WOODBURN (CONT'D)
We could use some drinks. Now.

Irked, Gawky strides toward Woodburn and Young Mountain.

GAWKY
Show me some I.D.

WOODBURN
We're closer to forty than twenty.

The bartender circumspectly eyes the circus performers.

GAWKY
House rules.

WOODBURN
Doesn't seem necessary.

GAWKY
I like to know names of the people in my place in case things get rowdy.
(he shrugs)
You wanna remain anonymous, go to a fag bar.

Young Mountain places his driver's license upon the bar. Gawky eyes the plastic card for a moment, nods his head, and returns his gaze to Woodburn.

GAWKY (CONT'D)
And now you, Mr. Universe.

Reluctantly, the strongman yields his driver's license. The bartender inspects the plastic card for a moment and wrinkles his brow.

GAWKY (CONT'D)
Are you Elias's boy?

No response comes from Woodburn, who did not want to show his identification to a local person for this very reason.

GAWKY (CONT'D)
I always thought you were dead.

Louder HARD ROCK MUSIC blasts from the jukebox as the strongman reclaims his ID from the bartender.

WOODBURN
Two whiskies. Put rocks-

GAWKY
Is this the first time you've been back since you ran away?

Irritation darkens Woodburn's face.

WOODBURN
I didn't "run away." I left.

Gawky turns away from Woodburn and eyes a rough group of bearded BIKERS who sit at the far end of the bar.

GAWKY
(calling out)
Hey Marshall! C'mere!

Rising from a bar stool is MARSHALL, a tall, wide, long-haired man of fifty-four whose thick arms are covered with tattoos of nude women and whose weathered face is obscured by a wild and prickly beard. Locals get out of the way of this big biker as he heads toward Woodburn and Young Mountain.

GAWKY (CONT'D)
This is Elias's boy!

Walking toward the corner of the bar, Marshall eyes Woodburn.

GAWKY (CONT'D)
The one with all the muscles.

MARSHALL
I didn't think it was the Indian.

The tattooed fellow nears the circus duo. Nobody looks kindly upon anybody.

MARSHALL (CONT'D)
Do you remember me?

WOODBURN
Nope. And don't remind me.

Marshall throws a look at Gawky.

MARSHALL
He don't seem too friendly.

GAWKY
He's a cactus.

The strongman eyes the bartender.

WOODBURN
Two whiskies. Put rocks in one.

Gawky exchanges a glance with Marshall and walks toward a shelf upon which sit several whisky bottles.

The tattooed fellow again appraises the strongman.

MARSHALL
I'm a friend of your pa's.

WOODBURN
That ain't gonna win you a handshake.

MARSHALL
You know that he had a stroke?

WOODBURN
Did it kill him?

MARSHALL
He's less than half there, but he's still breathing.

WOODBURN
Too bad.

Marshall frowns at Woodburn, who then turns away to face Young Mountain. The tattooed fellow shakes his head.

MARSHALL
You don't wanna turn your back to me while we're having a conversation.

WOODBURN
It ended.

Two Bikers CRACK their knuckles as they join Marshall. All three men stare at the back of Woodburn's head.

MARSHALL
You knew your mother was a whore, didn't you?

This provocation elicits no response from the strongman, who continues to wait for his drink without turning around.

MARSHALL (CONT'D)
You don't object to me talkin' about your dead mama thataway?

WOODBURN
Words coming from pile of trash don't mean nothing.
But if you touch me, you'll need to buy dentures before your next meal.

Marshall CHUCKLES to conceal his trepidations as Gawky reappears with two whiskies. The bartender throws a meaningful look at the tattooed leader.

GAWKY
Don't start anything that'll bring Jorgenson.

MARSHALL
I'll leave him be.
(to Woodburn)
I'm looking forward to seeing you boys perform tomorrow. I'll be the one with a big orange megaphone.

Flanked by Bikers, Marshall turns around and walks away. Locals clear from the path of this rough trio.

Woodburn claims his whisky from the bar, and the glass SHATTERS in his hand. Surprised, the strongman grimaces.

WOODBURN
Balls.

Young Mountain faces the bar and waves at Gawky.

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
Another whisky for my friend. Put it in a beer mug.

INT. BEDROOM / JORGENSON'S HOUSE - LATER

Wood CREAKS. A lamp shines on the nightstand of the panelled bedroom, where Sheriff Jorgenson currently makes love with his petite forty-eight year-old wife, LORRAINE. Her fingers dig into her husband's tan back as orgasmic spasms shake her body. Taking a deep breath, she opens her eyes.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Want another?

The petite blonde raises her head from the pillow and kisses the tall lawman upon the lips.

LORRAINE
Dealer's choice, though I'm satisfied.

Nodding, Sheriff Jorgenson resumes his sensual efforts. Somebody KNOCKS, and the husband and wife look at the door.

GIRL (O.S.)
Dad?

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Yeah?

GIRL (O.S.)
The TV's not working.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Read a book.

A foot STOMPS.

GIRL (O.S.)
Dad...

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Okay, darling. I'll be there in six minutes.

GIRL (O.S.)
Thanks.

Diminishing FOOTFALLS sound in the hallway as Sheriff Jorgenson returns his gaze to Lorraine, who is smirking.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Three to finish, two to hold each other, and one to dress.

The petite brunette CHUCKLES as the tall lawman resumes his sensual efforts. In a few seconds, she stops laughing.

EXT. CAMPGROUNDS BEHIND THE CIRCUS TENT - 2:30 AM

From the open field and into the circus campground stride Woodburn and Young Mountain. Few lights shine within the settled area, where the shapes of the various habitations are limned white by the sinking moon.

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
Good night.

WOODBURN
'Night.

The knife thrower veers toward the olive green tent that he shares with his common-law wife, the target girl.

Alone and intoxicated, the strongman proceeds toward his brown and tan motorhome. Doubts pester him, and his pace slows down until he is no longer walking.

Woodburn glances at the night sky, wherein hang myriad stars and the half moon. A gentle wind riffles his copper-brown hair as he considers his next actions.

Decided, the strongman turns to his right and walks in a different direction. His strides bring him past motorhomes, the lion cages, and tents. Ahead of him sits the object of his digression--the aquamarine trailer that Wendy shares with Clementine and Caramel.

The strongman continues walking forward. Lights are on inside of this mobile home, and somebody passes by its curtained side window. The figure did not look like a woman.

Woodburn stops. Standing in shadows, he watches the aquamarine trailer. Dark suspicions come to his mind.

WOODBURN (CONT'D)
(muttered to himself)
I shouldn't be here.

FOOTFALLS sound within the mobile home, and a few voices MUTTER something unintelligible.

The strongman wants to leave, but is unable to turn away from this suspicious nocturne.

A lock CLICKS. The door of the aquamarine trailer opens. Standing in the luminous portal are two fifty year-old BUSINESSMEN who wear suits and shiny Italian shoes. One is balding, and the other is chubby.

CHUBBY BUSINESSMAN
G'night ladies.

CLEMENTINE (O.S.)
Goodnight.

CARAMEL (O.S.)
'Night.

Woodburn's stomach tightens as he watches the Businessmen exit the trailer and walk across the campground. Hard-soled Italian shoes SQUEAK upon the damp grass.

Something blocks the outpouring light, and the strongman returns his gaze to the aquamarine trailer. Standing in the entrance and wearing only a blue robe is Wendy. The blond dancer eyes the two departing guys for a moment and then closes the door. A lock CLICKS.

Angry with his ex-girlfriend and himself, Woodburn turns around and proceeds toward his brown and tan motorhome. His jaw is tight as are his chest and throat.

WOODBURN
Goddamn it all.

Angry, the strongman nears the cages that contain the three lions.

The male who is named Zulu stalks the edges of his habitat as if looking for a way back to the veldt. Human and bestial eyes make brief contact.

Woodburn continues to his brown and tan motorhome, climbs the steps, and undoes the lock. His right hand twists the latch and flings the door, which then SMACKS against the side of the RV. The glass pane CRACKS. In his cage, the lion GROWLS.

INT. METAL SHACK / CIRCUS CAMPGROUND - NOON

Woodburn GRUNTS. It is noon of the circus's second day in Pinebranch, and the sun glares in the strongman's eyes as he bench presses four hundred pounds. INHALING, he lowers the ponderous barbell to his bare chest, which is covered with sweat. It is clear that the brooding fellow has been working out for hours.

His fists clench, and his pectoral muscles bulge. GRUNTING, Woodburn pushes the barbell toward the glaring sun.

A chime CLANGS, CLANGS again, and CLANGS a third time.

BARREL (O.S.)
Lunchtime!

EXT. CAMPGROUNDS BEHIND THE CIRCUS TENT - MOMENTS LATER

Woodburn pulls on a muscle shirt as he exits the metal shack and walks toward the food tent, where twenty Performers and Crewmen line up at a buffet table that is being attended by Barrel (the fat man), Caramel, and Wendy. The blond dancer sees at the strongman, who then turns his gaze elsewhere.

WENDY
Chad.

Ignoring this solicitation, Woodburn starts to walk toward the town of Pinebranch.

WENDY (CONT'D)
Chad! C'mere.

The strongman continues to the west.

INT. NICKEL'S TRAILER - SAME

The inside of the white trailer has maroon rugs, wood tables, and brown leather chairs. Sitting at a polished desk, Nickel drinks coffee and reads the front page of The Pinebranch Gazette, the cover of which has a photograph of an uncertain poodle. Somebody KNOCKS.

NICKEL
Yep.

The door opens, and in walks the Ringmaster, who is wearing slacks and a button-up short sleeve shirt.

RINGMASTER
You wished to see me before I went into town?

NICKEL
This's surprising-

The diminutive boss raises the local newspaper.

RINGMASTER
The Pinebranch Gazette is worthy of perusal?

NICKEL
No. Definitely not. But it indicates that there are as many as two literate people in this town.

RINGMASTER
The writer and a reader?

NICKEL
Right.
(he tosses the paper into the trash)
When you're in Pinebranch, pick me up something that was written in a metropolis. And see if that giant sheriff will send some men in uniform to the show tonight to keep people polite.

RINGMASTER
Each officer shall receive free food and two twenty dollar bills?

NICKEL
Yep.

EXT. SUBURBAN OUTSKIRTS OF TOWN - TWENTY MINUTES LATER

Sweating under the midday sun, Woodburn enters the eastern suburbs of Pinebranch. Beige, green, and tan houses stand in the one acre lots that are on either side of the road. Weeds cover many of these properties, and the dented and scratched vehicles that are in the driveways evince no better care.

A lopsided pickup truck RUMBLES toward the strongman. Behind the windshield is a BLACK WOMAN who warily gauges the muscular pedestrian as she drive past.

Woodburn continues west. His eyes flicker to the northeast corner, where stands a sign that reads, 'Maple Court'. Somewhere in the vicinity, an unhappy dog BARKS.

The strongman ruminates for a moment, makes a decision, and turns onto this cross street. His right hand pulls a handkerchief across his dripping face as he passes by two green homes and a badly collapsed white one. A yellow jeep RUMBLES at the far end of the next block.

Walking north, Woodburn pockets the damp cloth, looks to his right, and fixes his gaze upon a beige house that sits in the rear of a weedy property. The windows of this home are dark, and no vehicles sit in the driveway.

The strongman stops walking. Mixed memories return to the estranged Pinebranch native as he looks upon the beige house.

The RUMBLING jeep rolls closer, and Woodburn eyes the DRIVER, a big bellied and shirtless black fellow of forty-four who wears a bandana upon his bald head. Seeing the pedestrian, the man behind the wheel slows down and stops his vehicle.

DRIVER
Are you lost?

WOODBURN
You know this neighborhood?

DRIVER
Expertly. I live right there-
(he points to a nearby yellow house)
I really enjoyed your show last night.

WOODBURN
Thanks.

DRIVER
Wish I could do half the things you can, but...

CHUCKLING, the shirtless fellow PATS his exposed belly a couple of times.

DRIVER (CONT'D)
What d'you wanna know?

WOODBURN
Does Jessica Blockman still live there?-

Woodburn points to the beige house, and the Driver morosely shakes his head.

DRIVER
No...not any longer. She was killed.

The strongman feels a chill crawl up his back.

WOODBURN
What happened?

DRIVER
Car accident. Some drunk kids ran through the light on Main and Twentieth.

WOODBURN
When was this?

DRIVER
Nine or ten years ago. Her son was in the car too.

For a ponderous moment, Woodburn processes this bad news.

DRIVER (CONT'D)
You knew her?

WOODBURN
We went steady when we were kids.

DRIVER
She was a pretty little item.

WOODBURN
Yeah. She was.

DRIVER
Nice too--not stuck up the way most of the pretty ones are.

Saddened, the strongman nods his head.

DRIVER (CONT'D)
Sorry to give you the news.

WOODBURN
I'm obliged.

Woodburn waves amicably, turns away from the jeep, and starts to walk.

DRIVER
I'm bringing my cousins to see the show tonight.

WOODBURN
I hope you enjoy yourselves.

DRIVER
We will. And I'll be sure catch the tease act this time. A buddy of mine told me it was delicious.

No reply comes from the departing strongman, whose fists tighten as he corners west and heads towards Main Avenue.

INT. #1 BEST DINER - FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER

Glazed with sweat, Woodburn enters #1 Best Diner, where the bell on the door JINGLES. A few of the dozen perspiring LOCALS who people the place give the newly arrived stranger an eyeballing while R&B MUSIC plays. From the kitchen strides Jasmine, the tiny, gray-haired black proprietress who is her own waitress and cook. Her gaze fixes upon the new customer.

JASMINE
Good afternoon. Sorry that the air-conditioner's broke.
(she gestures expansively)
Sit anyplace you like.

Woodburn scans the establishment, locates the least populated corner, and claims a pine green booth in that area. His damp back, arms, and legs SQUEAK as he slides himself across the vinyl seat cushions.

JASMINE (CONT'D)
Menu's up there-

The proprietress motions to the wall.

WOODBURN
Do you make shrimp and grits?

JASMINE
Better than anyone. Four dollars and fifty cents.

WOODBURN
Two plates of that. And a bowl of gumbo.

JASMINE
Andouille or gator?

WOODBURN
Gator. And a pitcher of beer.

Jasmine turns away, and Woodburn reclines in his seat. A bathroom door SHUTS, and flip-flops repeatedly SCUFF the linoleum as the strongman wipes sweat from his face with a paper napkin.

GIRL'S VOICE (O.S.)
You're from the circus, right?

The strongman lowers the cloth and looks to the side. There stands HEATHER, a tall and skinny freckled brunette who wears cut-off denim shorts, an orange tank top, and flip-flops. It is unclear if she should be in high school or college.

WOODBURN
I am.

HEATHER
You're the strongman, right?

WOODBURN
Yep.

HEATHER
I saw you last night. Your name's Chad, right?

WOODBURN
Yep.

HEATHER
What's your last name?

WOODBURN
Chad's good enough.

Eyes sparkling with excitement, the freckled brunette grins.

HEATHER
I couldn't believe what you did to those cinder blocks. And that toaster.

WOODBURN
Never cared for toast.

Heather GIGGLES loudly at this tiny joke, and a few nearby Locals throw some eyeballs at her and Woodburn.

WOODBURN (CONT'D)
How old're you?

HEATHER
Twenty.

The strongman gestures to the bench that lies on the opposite side of the booth. Smiling, the freckled brunette swings her posterior onto the cushion and slides across the vinyl until she is directly facing her host.

WOODBURN
What's your name?

HEATHER
Heather.

WOODBURN
I like that name. The girls who have it are always pretty.

Blushing, Heather lowers her gaze to her hands.

Jasmine arrives at the table, sets down a pitcher of beer, a filled mug, and a bowl of steaming gumbo.

WOODBURN (CONT'D)
Thanks.
(to Heather)
Get something to drink if you'd like.

Heather nods her head and looks at Jasmine.

JASMINE
I don't think you're daddy would appreciate me bringing you liquor.

HEATHER
I want that strawberry soda that came in last week. Please.

Eyeballing the couple, the proprietress who is her own waitress turns from the table and departs. The strongman lowers his spoon into the bowl of gumbo and stirs.

WOODBURN
Heather.

HEATHER
Yeah?

WOODBURN
What kind of man's your daddy?

HEATHER
What d'you mean?

The strongman raises the spoon to his mouth and blows upon the gumbo.

WOODBURN
What does he do for a living?

HEATHER
Oh. He's a teacher. Kindergarten.

No longer concerned about a paternal reckoning, Woodburn savors a mouthful of thick soup, swallows, and nods his head.

WOODBURN
Tell me about yourself while I eat.

EXT. MAIN AVENUE - TWENTY MINUTES LATER

The bell JINGLES as the door to #1 Best Diner swings wide. Moderately buzzed, Woodburn follows Heather outside onto the Main Avenue sidewalk. (This departure is monitored by Jasmine and several Locals who are watching from within the diner.)

The freckled brunette takes the hand of the strongman and looks up. Sunlight shines upon her young face and highlights the pink ring that the strawberry soda left around her mouth.

HEATHER
I tried to wash it off in the bathroom.

WOODBURN
Don't worry about it. You've got a car?

Heather is surprised by this question.

HEATHER
No. I thought you had a motorhome.

WOODBURN
It's back at the camp.

HEATHER
You walked here? In this heat?

WOODBURN
It's not that far.
(he gestures ahead)
C'mon.

The freckled brunette looks concerned.

WOODBURN (CONT'D)
If you get tired or if your feet start to hurt, I'll carry you.

HEATHER
That sounds like fun.

WOODBURN
And there's a shower back at my place if you need.

Heather blushes as Woodburn puts his arm around her and guides her toward the next intersection.

Seeing something of interest, the freckled brunette motions to the facade of an abandoned Chinese food restaurant. Upon a boarded-up window is a bright red flyer that reads, 'Nickel Harrington's Travelling Circus is Here!' Below this proclamation are illustrations of roaring lions, Laughy, a bikini-clad target girl (surrounded by knives), an impossibly muscular strongman, tightrope walkers, and the dapper proprietor, who is wearing a tuxedo and top hat.

HEATHER
That drawing on there doesn't-

Tires SCREECH.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
Heather!

Heather and Woodburn look in the direction of this caller. Climbing out of a red muscle car that is parked on the opposite side of Main Avenue is JOHNNY, a mustached twenty-one year-old with curly hair who wears a plaid shirt, jeans, and boots. This fellow does not look happy.

JOHNNY
What do you think you're doing?

HEATHER
Go away.

Johnny glances at Woodburn, who then looks at Heather.

WOODBURN
Is this your boyfriend?

HEATHER
Used to be.

The mustached fellow crosses the road and approaches the freckled girl and her muscular companion.

WOODBURN
Heather says you two are quits.

JOHNNY
Stay out of this.

Woodburn interposes himself between Heather and Johnny.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)
This isn't any of your business.

WOODBURN
Take your car and go make doughnuts in a field.

JOHNNY
I'm not afraid of you.

WOODBURN
Then you're a moron.

The mustached fellow looks up and down the avenue, sees nobody else, and reaches into his back pocket.

WOODBURN (CONT'D)
Unless that's a comb for your mustache, you don't wanna pull it out.

Johnny withdraws a switchblade. A hard fist POUNDS his face, and he stumbles backward. Dropped, the knife CLATTERS upon the sidewalk.

WOODBURN (CONT'D)
Drive off.

Furious, the mustached fellow charges forward.

HEATHER
Stop!

Woodburn grabs Johnny by the neck and belt, raises him over his head, and throws him. The mustached fellow flies to the far side of Main Avenue and SLAMS on his back. Shaking, he GROANS and rises to his feet.

JOHNNY
You goddamn-

An oncoming car BEEPS its horn, and Johnny retreats onto the far sidewalk.

WOODBURN
Come at me again, and I'll throw you in front of a truck.

JOHNNY
Fuck you!

HEATHER
(shouting at Johnny)
Go back to the pool hall or home or wherever! I'm busy and wouldn't be with you anyhow.

Woodburn puts his arm around Heather and guides her up Main Avenue. Neither of them look back.

On the far side of the street, Johnny wipes blood from his face and balefully eyes the disappearing couple. Ten strides bring him to his dropped switchblade, which he then bends over and reclaims. Boiling with anger, the mustached fellow pockets his knife.

JOHNNY
This isn't over.

EXT. CAMPGROUNDS BEHIND THE CIRCUS TENT - 2 PM

Woodburn walks Heather into the languid circus encampment. Harry the Human Crab, Laughy, and Barrel (the fat man) sit at a table underneath an umbrella while listening to the radio broadcast of a baseball game on a transistor radio. The strongman looks at the seated trio, who are furtively appraising the freckled brunette.

WOODBURN
Are we expecting more people to turn up tonight?

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB
Depends on what you consider "people".

BARREL
Some of our Mexicans pasted up flyers in town.

WOODBURN
Flyers ain't television.

LAUGHY
Me and Clementine are touring the loudspeaker van a little later.

Harry the Human Crab points a cigarette at Heather and throws eyeballs at Woodburn.

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB
Looks like you might be encouraging some parents with shotguns to attend.

WOODBURN
You've got a lot of mouth for a guy who's a contraction.

The strongman guides the freckled brunette away from the seated group and toward the lion cages, where all three animals laze about in the afternoon heat.

HEATHER
Can I look up close?

WOODBURN
Sure.

Woodburn and Heather stop outside of the cage that houses Zulu, the male lion. The beast within YAWNS.

HEATHER
You think he minds being in the circus?

WOODBURN
Sometimes. One day he seems okay with the show, the easy meals, the cages, but other times, it's like he'd do anything to be somewhere else.

HEATHER
That's how I feel about working at the grocery store.

The strongman guides the freckled brunette forward, and she gently runs her fingertips across the metal bars, which RING.

HEATHER (CONT'D)
Have you ever been to prison?

WOODBURN
Once. For a coupla years.

HEATHER
What'd you do?

The couple nears the brown and tan motorhome.

WOODBURN
I got in bar fight that went on a lot longer than the other guys wanted it to go.

Woodburn stands beside the entrance of his vehicle and opens the door, the broken window of which is now held together by duct tape. Flip-flops SCUFF metal steps as Heather climbs.

INT. WOODBURN'S MOTORHOME - SAME

The strongman follows the freckled brunette into the dark motorhome, closes the door, and turns the bolt. His right hand pulls the shade away from the central skylight. Sunshine glares upon the beige carpet, bounces everywhere, and illuminates the habitat with a diffused glow. SNIFFING the air, the guest wrinkles her brow and faces her host.

HEATHER
It smells like perfume in here.

WOODBURN
My ex broke a bottle when she moved out.

HEATHER
Marking her territory?

WOODBURN
(brusquely)
She and I are done.

Uncomfortable, Heather nods her head.

HEATHER
Okay.
(she looks around)
Do you bring a lot of girls back here?

WOODBURN
Not in a long time.

Woodburn goes over to the sink, runs the water, and washes his hands.

HEATHER
Are you seeing anybody now? Steady?

WOODBURN
No.

The strongman turns off the faucet and wipes his hands on a floral hand towel.

WOODBURN (CONT'D)
Do you want something to drink or to just keep asking me personal questions?

HEATHER
Sorry. I'm just nervous. And you're sort of intimidating.

WOODBURN
I've never hurt a woman in my life

HEATHER
Okay.

WOODBURN
You want a whiskey and soda?

HEATHER
Sounds good.

Woodburn walks to the half-sized refrigerator and grabs the materials for his drinks while Heather goes over to the sink and runs the water.

HEATHER (CONT'D)
You must go all over the country in this thing. Coast to coast.
(she looks around)
Farthest I ever went was Colorado.
(she picks up a green bar of soap)
Had a grandfather who died there, and it was for his funeral. I didn't really know him.
(she lathers her hands)
It was nice--Colorado--but it wasn't as different over there as I thought it'd be.
(she rinses her hands)
More mountains, I guess.

Woodburn carries two iced drinks over to Heather, who is drying her hands with the floral towel. Turning around, the freckled brunette looks at the strongman. Ice cubes drift as two sets of eyes meet.

Woodburn sets the glasses by the sink and presses his mouth to Heather's stained lips. They kiss.

The strongman steps back, reclaims the drinks, and gives one to the freckled brunette.

HEATHER (CONT'D)
Do I taste like strawberry soda?

WOODBURN
A little.

Woodburn takes a mouthful of his whisky while Heather drinks down her entire beverage. Her shaking right hand places the empty glass by the sink.

WOODBURN (CONT'D)
You sure you wanna do this? It's okay if you-

Heather mashes her lips against Woodburn's mouth and kisses him deeply. Without breaking the connection, the strongman sets his glass near the sink, curls his right arm around the freckled brunette's back, and brings her close. Bodies and tongues press together. A MOAN rises from deep within the young woman.

Woodburn tightens his hold upon Heather, who presses her pelvis against his right thigh.

Slim and pale fingers play across his thick arms as his left hand run under her shirt and up her back. A bra clasp CLICKS.

HEATHER
That's faster than Johnny could ever do.

The strongman leans back, peels the shirt off of the freckled brunette, and tosses aside her brassiere. His eyes look upon her small, high breasts.

HEATHER (CONT'D)
I wish they were bigger.

WOODBURN
They're pretty.

Woodburn scoops Heather off of the ground and takes a breast into his mouth. Her toes curl, and her flip-flops fall on the carpet while she runs her fingers through his hair.

The strongman lifts his head, kisses the freckled brunette on the lips, adjusts his arms, carries her to the sofa bed, and sets her on the mattress. Standing nearby, he kicks off his shoes and peels off his muscle shirt.

Heather kneels on the bed, looks up at Woodburn with her big eyes, and places her right hand upon his groin.

HEATHER
Can I?

WOODBURN
I haven't washed today.

HEATHER
Good.

Heather licks sweat off of Woodburn's abdomen as her nimble fingertips unbutton his cut-off jeans and unzip his fly.

Thoughts of the blond dancer come to the strongman while the freckled brunette reaches into his boxer shorts.

HEATHER (CONT'D)
I'll help.

Irked, Woodburn brushes away Heather's hands, unbuttons her shorts, and rolls her onto her stomach.

WOODBURN
I don't need help.

The strongman grabs the freckled brunette's bottoms by the waist, pulls them down her legs, and flings them aside. Quickly, he removes his own shorts and underwear.

Prone on the sofa bed, Heather turns her head, eyes his groin, and grows concerned.

HEATHER
Is something wrong?

WOODBURN
Get on all fours.

The freckled brunette rises to her hands and knees.

HEATHER
You like it from-

WOODBURN
Shhh.

Gripping Heather's hips, Woodburn closes his eyes and INHALES the scent of Wendy's perfume. His blood stirs. Again, he draws into his head and lungs the smell of his ex-girlfriend.

HEATHER
Are you-

The strongman thrusts himself into the freckled brunette. GASPING, she clutches the tan blanket.

WOODBURN
It's like a telephone pole.

Eyes closed, Woodburn withdraws his hips, INHALES Wendy's scent, and vigorously reenters Heather. MOANING, the freckled brunette tightens her grip upon the blanket.

HEATHER
Jesus it hurts.

WOODBURN
Good or bad?

HEATHER
Both.

INT. KITCHEN / JORGENSON'S HOUSE - 3:10 PM

Dressed in jeans and a crew shirt, Sheriff Jorgenson enters a yellow kitchen, where his wife Lorraine holds a telephone receiver to her ear with her right shoulder while she opens a can of tomatoes with a WHIRRING appliance. The petite blonde smiles at the tall lawman, sees something, and points to the hem of his shirt. Several blades of grass are removed from this spot and tossed into the trash basket.

LORRAINE
(into the phone)
Bill just got in from mowing the lawn, so I'd better-
(she listens)
I'll get it next time I'm in the book store. It sounds interesting.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Still your mother?

Lorraine nods her head ‘yes’ to Sheriff Jorgenson.

SHERIFF JORGENSON (CONT’D)
Give her my love.

LORRAINE
(into the phone)
Bill sends his love.
(to Sheriff Jorgenson)
She sends hers.
(into the phone)
I will. Bye.

The petite blonde hangs the receiver on the wall.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
You’ve been on with her the entire time I was mowing?

LORRAINE
It’s on her long distance bill, not ours. And she had-

The phone RINGS. Lorraine and Sheriff Jorgenson look over.

LORRAINE (CONT’D)
She probably forgot to tell me something.

Again, the phone RINGS.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Could be somebody who’d been trying to get through while you were on.

In the middle of the third RING, Lorraine picks up the phone and places the receiver to her right ear.

LORRAINE
Hello?
(she listens)
He is, but it’s his day off. Who’s this?
(she listens and wrinkles her brow)
Okay. Here he is-

Puzzled, the petite woman covers the mouthpiece.

LORRAINE (CONT’D)
It’s Jasmine. From the diner.

Equally perplexed, Sheriff Jorgenson claims the receiver.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Sheriff Jorgenson here.

The tall lawman listens to the caller, and soon, his face clouds with anger.

EXT. MAIN AVENUE - SAME

A red, yellow, and green van that has four loudspeakers on its roof rolls south on Main Avenue. CIRCUS MUSIC plays from the overhead set-up of this vehicle, the sides of which read, “Come See Nickel Harrington’s Travelling Circus Tonight!’ The top half of the bikini-clad redhead Clementine juts from an open sunroof, and behind the wheel, a fully costumed and made up Laughy thumbs the talk bar of his handheld microphone.

LAUGHY
(into the handheld mic)
Attention civilians!

Amplified words ECHO in all directions.

LAUGHY (CONT’D)
This is Laughy, and I’m here to tell you about Nickel Harrington’s world famous Travelling Circus.

CIRCUS MUSIC resumes. LOCALS walk outside or go to shop windows to get a closer look at the rolling advertisement. Male eyeballs appraise the smiling dancer.

LAUGHY (CONT’D)
We’ve got a knife thrower, and we’ve got a lion tamer; we’ve got his lions, and we’ve got a tightrope act; we’ve got the top half of this woman, and we’ve got her bottom.

Laughy HONKS the car horn. Clementine winks at a score of gaping Locals, two of whom wipe saliva from their mouths.

LAUGHY (CONT’D)
All of these things are better than you could ever imagine, so don’t hurt your tiny little brains trying to imagine them. Get in your cars, hop in your pickup trucks, saddle your spouses, and head on over to the circus!

A traffic light turns red, and the clown applies the brakes. The advertising van stops. CIRCUS MUSIC continues to play while Clementine waves and winks at the Locals.

Through the windshield, Laughy notices Ralph, the homeless veteran of twenty-three who still wears his military greens. The young man is sitting on the pavement and staring at nothing.

Suddenly serious, the clown lowers the volume of the CIRCUS MUSIC that plays overhead.

LAUGHY (CONT'D)
Clementine?

CLEMENTINE
Yeah?

LAUGHY
Pull your lumps inside.

Clementine lowers herself into the van as Laughy dials the wheel, sidles to the curb, and rolls down his window.

LAUGHY (CONT'D)
Soldier.

Ralph looks up from the pavement with red and distant eyes.

LAUGHY (CONT'D)
What division were you in?

The homeless veteran stares at the clown. It is unclear whether or not he understands the question that was asked.

LAUGHY (CONT'D)
I fought with the 24th Infantry. That was back in Korea.

RALPH
I was with the 198th.

LAUGHY
Infantry?

Ralph nods his head, 'yes'.

LAUGHY (CONT'D)
Soldiers in uniform get in free at Nickel Harrington's Travelling Circus. Always.

The homeless veteran considers the suggested diversion.

LAUGHY (CONT'D)
If you need a ride over to the tent, I'll be happy to-

RALPH
Sorry. I...I don't think I could sit and watch a circus.

LAUGHY
It's a terrific show with plenty of variety. It might help you get your mind off of things.

The homeless veteran shakes his head 'no' and lowers his gaze again to the cracked sidewalk.

RALPH
Thanks.

LAUGHY
I understand.

A heavy sadness fills the clown.

LAUGHY (CONT'D)
Can I buy you something to drink?

Ralph looks up.

RALPH
A bottle of whiskey would really help move the day along.

LAUGHY
Okay. I'll get you one.

INT. RIGHT HOOK RONNIE'S LIQUOR - TEN MINUTES LATER

The bell on a cracked glass door that has an iron gate JINGLES as Laughy enters a sizable liquor store. A MUSCULAR CUSTOMER of twenty browses a collection of jug wine near the front, and shelves of green, clear, crimson, brown, and amber bottles fill the remainder. Minding this alcoholic inventory is RIGHT HOOK RONNIE, a red-faced, broad-shouldered, and potbellied man of forty-six in overalls who has cauliflower ears, small eyes, and crewcut silver hair. Six framed photographs of the proprietor throwing fists into the faces of various black opponents hang upon the walls.

At present, Right Hook Ronnie appraises Laughy and wrinkles his mouth with disdain.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
Did you come in here to buy something or just make jokes?

LAUGHY
I'm a customer.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
Then feel free to peruse the inventory.

The clown walks to a shelving unit, scans some whisky bottles, and selects one. Behind the counter, the retired boxer scrutinizes the unfamiliar customer, whose face and neck are covered with make-up, and whose hands are gloved.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE (CONT'D)
What color are you under all of that make-up?

Laughy sets the whisky bottle upon the counter.

LAUGHY
How much is this?

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
You didn't answer my question.

LAUGHY
Is my skin color important?

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
Could be.

LAUGHY
What's the price?

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
Twenty-five dollars.

Incredulous, the clown raises his eyebrows.

LAUGHY
It should be ten.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
Unless I know that I'm selling it to a white person, it's twenty-five.

Laughy looks coolly at Right Hook Ronnie, turns away from the counter, and walks toward the door.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE (CONT'D)
If you aren't going to purchase this whiskey, you need to put it back.

Ignoring this directive, the clown nears the exit.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE (CONT'D)
Freddie.

The muscular customer who is named FREDDIE quickly interposes himself between Laughy and the door.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE (CONT'D)
Heed my words, Mr. Funny Man. You're going to walk over here, you're going to pick up this whisky bottle, and you're going to put it back on the shelf, exactly where it was before you came in--with the label facing out just like all the others.

The clown turns his attention from the human obstacle to the retired boxer.

LAUGHY
If I pick up that bottle, it's going someplace else.

Right Hook Ronnie nods and Freddie SLAMS a fist into Laughy's stomach. Air WHOOSHES from the clown's mouth, and he doubles over.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
Freddie's my protege.
Even though he favors his uppercut more than is advisable, he has the potential to be a contender.

The muscular young man SNAPS a deadbolt and flips a dangling sign so that the 'CLOSED' side faces the street.

WHEEZING and sweating, the sixty-two year-old circus performer stands upright. The retired boxer SLAMS the whiskey bottle against the counter top.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE (CONT'D)
Put this back unless you want to feel his mentor's famous right hook.

Laughy nods his head, holds his stomach, and walks toward the counter while dripping sweat removes a little bit of his makeup. Right Hook Ronnie SNORTS with disbelief.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE (CONT'D)
You're white under there.

No reply issues from the clown, who is currently three steps away from the counter.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE (CONT'D)
Why didn't you say anything if you were white?

Laughy stops at the counter, across the surface of which Right Hook Ronnie slides the whiskey bottle.

SNURIGHT HOOK RONNIE
You just like to make trouble?

The clown squirts water into the retired boxer's eyes.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
Asshole!

Right Hook Ronnie reaches for the throat of Laughy, but before his hands grab anything, he feels the cold metal of a snub-noses revolver press into his neck.

The clown THUMBS the hammer, which CLICKS. Everybody in the store freezes.

LAUGHY
Freddie.

FREDDIE
Yeah?

LAUGHY
Unlock the door and walk to the back.

Freddie looks at Right Hook Ronnie, who still has a gun jammed into his neck. Reluctantly, the retired boxer nods his head. The muscular young man unlocks the door and walks to the farthest corner.

LAUGHY (CONT'D)
(to Right Hook Ronnie)
Where else can I buy a bottle of whisky?

Right Hook Ronnie stares back at Laughy with hate. Still holding the revolver, the clown presses his cherry red squirt gun into the retired boxer's left nostril and squeezes the plastic trigger. Water shoots into the redneck's nasal cavity, and he CHOKES and COUGHS and SPITS out fluid.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
Goddamn you, you fucking-

The revolver and the cherry red squirt gun are pressed deeper into reddening flesh.

LAUGHY
Where else can I buy a bottle?

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
There's a place on Second and Main.

Laughy withdraws the squirt gun from Right Hook Ronnie's left nostril and sprays water into his eyes.

LAUGHY
I couldn't help myself.

The retired boxer boils. Keeping the revolver raised, the clown pockets his squirt gun, backs all the way to the front door, and exits the liquor store. The bell JINGLES.

FREDDIE
You okay?

Right Hook Ronnie wipes water from his eyes and looks toward the glass door. Outside of the shop, Laughy enters his circus van and drives off.

FREDDIE (CONT'D)
Ronnie?

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
Call Cousin Dan and Nephew.

FREDDIE
We're going to the circus?

Furious, the retired boxer nods his head, 'yes.'

EXT. CAMPGROUNDS BEHIND THE CIRCUS TENT - 3:50

The sun is past the center of the sky and starting to fall. A blue sedan rolls up to the edge of the circus encampment, where some of the Performers and Crewmen are actively readying the show. The vehicle stops, and the driver's door opens. From out of this automobile strides Sheriff Jorgenson, who is wearing a bronze star on his sweaty crew shirt, jeans and cowboy boots. Fastened around his waist is his gun belt, which currently holds a revolver. The tall lawman shuts his door and looks around the camp with hard eyes.

Maestro notices the outsider and plays a CAVALRY CALL upon his trumpet. Barrel (the fat man), the Ringmaster (dressed in pinstriped slacks and an undershirt), Johnson (the lion tamer), the Ritornellis, and other Performers and Crewmen eye Sheriff Jorgenson, whose walks directly into camp.

At present, the tall lawman reaches a table, where Wendy, Caramel, and Dirty Rita play cards.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Pardon me.

The seated trio looks up at the tall lawman. Although he is in a rush, his manner is still composed.

SHERIFF JORGENSON (CONT'D)
Where can I find the strongman?

DIRTY RITA
Why?

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Police business. Which trailer's his?

Dirty Rita shrugs, SHUFFLES a pack of playing cards, and returns her attention to Wendy and Caramel.

Irked, Sheriff Jorgenson scans the vicinity until he sees Nickel. Without another wasted word, the tall lawman proceeds directly toward the diminutive boss.

WENDY
I wonder what this's about?

CARAMEL
Woodburn's troubles ain't yours no longer.

Dirty Rita deals cards to Wendy, Caramel, and herself as Sheriff Jorgenson nears Nickel. The diminutive boss sees the tall lawman and puts a big, phony smile on his face.

NICKEL
Good afternoon, Sheriff. I inquired earlier today about getting some officers in uniform at our show t-

SHERIFF JORGENSON
I’m here for something else.

INT. WOODBURN’S MOTORHOME - SAME

Slanted sunshine streams through the skylight and illuminates Woodburn and Heather, who currently lie nude upon the sofa bed. A blanket covers the nether parts of their anatomies, and iced drinks rest on the floor within arm’s reach of each person. An oscillating table fan moves air around the motorhome while the freckled brunette ruminates.

HEATHER
Is it okay if I ask something?

No reply comes from Woodburn.

HEATHER (CONT’D)
Why’d you stop? Before...when we were screwing.

WOODBURN
I need to save my energy for the show.

HEATHER
But you didn’t even finish.

The freckled brunette turns her head and gauges the strongman, who is currently looking at the skylight. No explanation comes from the tacit fellow.

HEATHER (CONT’D)
You think I’m pretty, don’t you?

WOODBURN
You’re pretty.

HEATHER
As pretty as those other girls named Heather?

WOODBURN
Prettier.

Heather kisses Woodburn on the cheek, takes a sip of her drink, and lies back down.

HEATHER
Are you thinking about your ex or something?

WOODBURN
I’m trying not to think.

HEATHER
Can you do that?

WOODBURN
What?

HEATHER
Think about nothing?

The oscillating fan pushes around musky and perfumed air as the strongman considers this question.

WOODBURN
Not usually.

HEATHER
I try to do it sometimes--think about nothing--clear out my mind when I can't go to sleep--but almost always I start imagining empty spaces, and a lot of times that gets me to thinking about outer space.
The problem is, if you think about outer space long enough, you start thinking about stars and planets, and pretty soon, you're wondering if there's life out there.

No response comes from Woodburn, who stares blankly at the luminous skylight.

HEATHER (CONT'D)
Do you think there is?

WOODBURN
What?

HEATHER
Life out there? In space.
That there're people like us--but green, maybe, or with three eyes or giant wings--and they're having a conversation just like this one, but on some other planet?

WOODBURN
I've never really thought about it.

HEATHER
Maybe it's a place where the people are always happy?

A fist POUNDS against the door. Heather YELPS and looks at the entrance as Woodburn slowly raises his head.

WOODBURN
Yeah?

SHERIFF JORGENSON (O.S.)
Open up. This's Sheriff Jorgenson.

Heather is terrified.

HEATHER
(whispered)
I've gotta hide.

WOODBURN
You're old enough.

HEATHER
(whispered)
He's my daddy.

The strongman bites back a curse as the freckled brunette lunges out of bed and pulls on her shorts.

SHERIFF JORGENSON (O.S.)
Open this door right quick or I'll open it with my boots.

WOODBURN
Give me a couple seconds to put on some clothes.

SHERIFF JORGENSON (O.S.)
Is Heather in there?

Heather frantically shakes her head back and forth as she pulls on her t-shirt.

WOODBURN
(to Heather)
I'm not a liar.
(calling out)
She's here.

EXT. CAMPGROUNDS BEHIND THE CIRCUS TENT - SAME

Sickened, Sheriff Jorgenson turns his head from the door and looks at the ground. His fists are tight at his sides, and his long, stiff face is pale.

FOOTFALLS sound within the motorhome. A lock CLICKS. Eyes on the ground, Heather walks outside and down the steps. Sheriff Jorgenson gestures toward his blue sedan.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Get in the car.

Embarrassed, Heather nods her head and departs. Woodburn appears in the doorway and looks down at Sheriff Jorgenson.

WOODBURN (O.S.)
She told me she's of age. She is?

SHERIFF JORGENSON
By a couple months.

The tall lawman withdraws his revolver, flings the cylinder, and dumps the cartridges into the dirt. At present, he holsters his empty gun.

SHERIFF JORGENSON (CONT'D)
Come down here so we're talking face to face.

Barefoot, Woodburn walks down the steps and faces Sheriff Jorgenson, whose boot heels and uncommon height put him six inches taller than the strongman. (Performers and Crewmen start to appear at the perimeters of this confrontation.)

SHERIFF JORGENSON (CONT'D)
Is there anything you wanna say about what happened?

WOODBURN
There's nothing I can say that'd help things.

Sheriff Jorgenson undoes his belt and sets the holstered and empty weapon upon the ground. Woodburn shakes his head, 'no'.

WOODBURN (CONT'D)
I ain't trading fists with a sheriff.

The tall lawman removes the bronze star from his shirt, sets the icon atop his emptied gun, and stands upright. His shoulders pivot, and his clenched fists guard his face.

WOODBURN (CONT'D)
I'm not tussling with you.

Sheriff Jorgenson SLAMS a fist into Woodburn's stomach. Air WHOOSHES from the strongman's mouth, and he GRUNTS.

The Performers and Crewmen watch in silence as Woodburn fills his lungs, lifts his chin, and eyes Sheriff Jorgenson.

WOODBURN (CONT'D)
Still.

The tall lawman throws a right jab that CRACKS cartilage. GRUNTING, the strongman stumbles back a step. Blood runs from his broken nose and down his chin. Somebody in the crowd WHISTLES at the severity of this blow.

Anger boils inside of Woodburn, but he manages to keep himself together.

WOODBURN (CONT'D)
You get one more before I head to my shack and lift iron.

Sheriff Jorgenson throws a left hook at Woodburn's right cheek. The big fist impacts with a loud CRACK.

Knocked askew, the strongman stumbles a step and finds his balance. Blood drips from his cut face, which is already starting to swell up.

WOODBURN (CONT'D)
We're done.

Nickel and Young Mountain approach as Woodburn turns away from Sheriff Jorgenson. The tall lawman's hand lands on the strongman's shoulder and spins him around.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Nope.

NICKEL
Don't!

Sheriff Jorgenson launches jabs that THUD against Woodburn's stomach and sternum. A right hook CRACKS against the strongman's jaw, knocking him sideways, and a left uppercut POUNDS his mouth.

NICKEL (CONT'D)
Stop it now!

Nickel and Young Mountain interpose themselves between Sheriff Jorgenson and Woodburn.

Blood drips from the busted face of the strongman, and fury shines in his eyes. The tall lawman rubs his raw knuckles while glaring at his foe.

Nickel steps closer to Sheriff Jorgenson and shakes his head.

NICKEL (CONT'D)
You dished out more than enough.
He didn't break any laws.

Nickel and Young Mountain remain between Woodburn and Sheriff Jorgenson, both of whom stare at each other in silence. The strongman is shaking from the tremendous effort of suppressing his violent instincts.

NICKEL (CONT'D)
Time for you to get in that car and drive your daughter home.

The tall lawman picks up his bronze star and gun belt, pockets the loose rounds, and eyes the strongman, whose gaze is deadly.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
A fellow your age oughta know the difference between behaving like a human being and acting like an animal.

Disgusted, Sheriff Jorgenson turns around, strides toward his blue sedan, and eyes Heather, who sits in the passenger seat with her wet face in her hands. Dry grass CRUNCHES under his hard boots.

Blood drips from Woodburn's cut cheek, broken nose, and smashed lips as he walks away from his motorhome. Performers and Crewmen scatter from the strongman's path.

Woodburn rounds the corner and comes face to face with Wendy, whose eyes are red from crying.

WENDY
How old was that girl?

The furious strongman does not reply.

WENDY (CONT'D)
You're not gonna talk to me?

WOODBURN
I need to press iron.

WENDY
We broke up three days ago and already you go and fuck some teenage hillbilly?

WOODBURN
She ain't your business any more than those Johns you had in your trailer last night are mine.

Disbelief flashes hotly upon the blond dancer's face.

WENDY
Johns? Those guys were Clementine's cousins!

WOODBURN
Did you make sure they had a good time?

Wendy SLAPS Woodburn's battered face. Pain shoots through his skull, and he suppresses a violent response. The blond dancer walks away in anger as the strongman clenches his hands.

INT. METAL SHACK / CIRCUS CAMPGROUND - TWILIGHT

Woodburn GRUNTS, sweats, and bleeds as his fists push the loaded barbell toward the twilit sky. Four hundred and fifty pounds rise. Bulging muscles and pulsating arteries show the tremendous strain that this effort has on his system. INHALING, the strongman lowers the weights to his chest.

INT. GAWKY'S ROCK BAR - SAME

A heavy KNOCK echoes throughout the rock bar, which is currently uninhabited. Smoking a cigarette, holding a bottle of rum, and shirtless, the skinny bartender and proprietor who is named Gawky emerges from a back room. His strides carry him to the entrance, which he then unlocks and opens.

Standing in the doorway is Marshall, the big, long-haired, and tattooed biker of fifty-four who is friends with Woodburn's father. A cruel smirk sits in the middle of his prickly beard as he enters the establishment. Following this ringleader are four BIKERS, two of whom carry crowbars.

INT. ROD'S POOL HALL - SAME

SOUL MUSIC plays as a rolling cue ball misses its target, strikes a rail, and caroms into a pocket within a smoky pool hall that has ten tables and a dozen BLACK PLAYERS.

Heather's ex-boyfriend Johnny sits in the sequestered refreshment area with a soda and a basket of french fries. The mustached white guy's right ear and left hand are bandaged from the injuries that he sustained when the strongman threw him across Main Avenue.

A switchblade CLICKS, and its blade flashes. Johnny spears and eats a french fry. FOOTFALLS sound, and he looks up.

Walking into the refreshment area are DUANE and TYRONE, black twins of twenty-four who have high-tops, sleeveless denim jackets, and Afros. The former sibling is missing two fingers on his right hand, and the latter has no left ear, but otherwise, their appearances are identical.

Johnny gestures to two open seats. Duane and Tyrone sit. Looking around, the mustached fellow slides a pile of napkins across the table toward the twins. The eight-fingered sibling riffles these and sees within them a hidden stack of ten dollar bills.

INT. RIGHT HOOK RONNIE'S LIQUOR - SAME

Right Hook Ronnie SNAPS the lock on the door of the liquor store in which he earlier confronted Laughy. The retired boxer eyes his muscular protege, Freddie, and two red-faced men who are in their thirties--a fat, bearded guy who is named COUSIN DAN, and a lean, chinless fellow who goes by the sobriquet NEPHEW.

At present, Right Hook Ronnie turns off the overhead lights and leads the trio across the twilit room.

INT. BACK OFFICE / RIGHT HOOK RONNIE'S LIQUOR - SAME

Two locks SNAP, and a door swings open. The retired boxer walks into his back office, where fluorescent bulbs BUZZ overhead. Hanging on the walls of this room are pictures of black men who have been lynched, a confederate flag, and photographs of a few burning crosses.

Freddie, Cousin Dan, and Nephew enter. Right Hook Ronnie shuts the door, twists a deadbolt, and goes over to a tall metal cabinet. With a JINGLING set of keys, the retired boxer undoes three padlocks.

Right Hook Ronnie CRACKS his knuckles and opens the cabinet door. Lying within are revolvers, semiautomatic handguns, hunting rifles, pump-action shotguns, tear gas grenades, and gas masks. All of this gear is well maintained.

Impressed, Freddie and Cousin Dan nod in approval. Nephew WHISTLES as if he is looking at a beautiful woman.

INT. METAL SHACK / CIRCUS CAMPGROUND - SAME

GRUNTING and EXHALING, Woodburn pushes the weighted barbell off of his chest. His arms tremble underneath the four-hundred-and-fifty-pound load, but inexorably, he fights gravity. A fist CLANKS twice against a metal sheet.

WOODBURN
Busy.

LAUGHY (O.S.)
The boss wants to talk to everybody.

The strongman GRUNTS as he extends his arms all the way and heaves the barbell backward. Weights THUD upon the ground, roll, and CLANK against cinder blocks.

WOODBURN
En route.

EXT. CAMPGROUNDS BEHIND THE CIRCUS TENT - SAME

The declining sun tosses golden light and long shadows all over the campgrounds. Woodburn wipes blood and sweat from his battered face with a handkerchief as he emerges from the metal shack and joins Laughy, who is holding a bag of ice against his stomach. The strongman and the clown walk west.

WOODBURN
You okay?

LAUGHY
Better than you.

Ahead of Woodburn and Laughy and assembled outside of Nickel Harrington’s white motorhome are five Crewmen (two of whom are bruised), six Performers, Barrel, Harry the Human Crab, Dirty Rita, Young Mountain, Paloma, the Ringmaster, Johnson, both Ritornellis, the Bearded Lady, Maestro, Clementine, Caramel, and Wendy.

Walking with the clown, the strongman joins the group and makes eye contact with the blond dancer, who then frowns and looks away in disgust.

Something CLICKS, and the door of the white motorhome opens. Through the portal strides Nickel, who is wearing shiny Italian shoes, a dark green suit, and a matching bow tie.

His hair is slick, and his face is grave. Everybody in attendance silently waits for the respected boss to speak.

NICKEL
Three crew guys got jumped in Rod's Pool Hall last night, and Laughy was attacked today buying booze at a place called Right Hook Ronnie's. If you go into town, avoid these establishments.

A few people glance at the injured parties.

NICKEL (CONT'D)
Pinebranch is a small black nugget of shit in the vast brown ocean of shit that is the south. I never wanted to bring my circus here, but because of some drunk idiots in Wisconsin, I had to.
So we're here.
The crowd we had in the big top last night was small, mouthy, and mean, and considering the interactions we've had with these sister-lovers since then, I expect tonight to be worse.
The police aren't gonna offer us any protection, which you probably deduced from the lovely chat that the sheriff had with our strongman.

For a moment, the diminutive boss lets his words settle.

NICKEL (CONT'D)
Any performer who doesn't want to go on tonight, doesn't have to. The crowd will be churlish at best and dangerous at worst.
You won't get paid if you duck out, but you'll still have a job at Harrington's.

Performers consider the proffered alternative.

NICKEL (CONT'D)
Let me know if you're stepping off so I can juggle the card or get somebody to man your booth.
Also--and this is very important--
if you decide to perform tonight, do not antagonize this bunch. These sister-lovers are looking for reasons to get wild, so don't give them any. If you can't ignore what they're flinging at you, walk off.
That's all.

MURMURING, the crowd disperses. Woodburn looks at Wendy, who departs without returning his gaze. Self-recriminations trouble the battered strongman.

NICKEL (CONT'D)
Woodburn. Laughy.

The strongman and the clown look toward the diminutive boss, who is walking down the steps of his motorhome.

WOODBURN
Yeah?

LAUGHY
Boss?

NICKEL
Each of you has a bright yellow bullseye on your chest.

WOODBURN
I'm performing unless you tell me I can't.

LAUGHY
I've already got some surprises ready for these sister-lovers.

Concern plays upon the face of Nickel Harrington, but is soon replaced by a fatherly pride.

NICKEL
Thanks for being professionals.

WOODBURN
You took me on back when nobody else would. The gratitude that earns from me won't ever run out.

EXT. CIRCUS MIDWAY - TWILIGHT

CIRCUS MUSIC plays from the loudspeaker van and enlivens the midway. Twenty LOCALS drink and smoke around the 'Belly Buster' and 'Young & Naked Chicks' booths (and three portable bathrooms) that stand between the big top and The Exhibition of Bizarre Horrors. Perched atop a wooden barrel in front of the sideshow is Nickel, suited and holding the small end of an electric bullhorn to his mouth.

NICKEL
(into the bullhorn)
Are you the kind of person who rubbernecks at car accidents?
Are you the kind of person who takes a date to an autopsy?
Are you the kind of person who watches the nightly news?
If you answered 'Yes!' to any of these questions, then The Exhibition of Bizarre Horrors is for you!

INT. VIEWING HALL / THE EXHIBITION OF BIZARRE HORRORS - SAME

Dressed in custom-made plaid overalls, the fat man Barrel sits atop his namesake on the sideshow stage. Fifteen LOCALS people this tent as well as Right Hook Ronnie, Freddie, Cousin Dan, and Nephew. At present, the obese performer chugs an upended two-liter bottle of orange soda.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
Did the store run out of watermelon flavor?

The retired boxer's underlings CHUCKLE at his remark, as do a few other Pinebranch Locals. At present, the final remainder of orange soda drains into the fat man, who then tosses the bottle into a trash can. A few old people CLAP.

BARREL
Thank you.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
I've got a question for you.

Barrel looks at Right Hook Ronnie, who has been heckling him throughout the performance. The fat man does not invite the question, but knows that it will be uttered regardless.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE (CONT'D)
Did you gain all that blubber so that people would call you something besides 'nigger'?

Freddie, Cousin Dan, and Nephew CHUCKLE as do a few teenaged Locals. Barrel stuffs down his anger and picks up a golden kazoo, which he then inserts in his belly-button.

BARREL
For my next-

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
Though I suppose all of that weight would make it hard for some boys in white hoods to put you in a noose.

The kazoo CLATTERS on the ground, and a few hecklers CHUCKLE. Simmering with anger, Barrel rises from his seat, walks across the stage, and departs through a flap in the curtain.

Contented grins sit on the chins of Right Hook Ronnie, Freddie, Cousin Dan, and Nephew. Other members of the audience throw unkind looks at the retired boxer. One angry OLD MAN clears his throat and waggles a finger.

OLD MAN
My wife and I wanted to see him play that kazoo!

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
Simmer down, gramps.

Cousin Dan drinks deeply from a whisky flask as the flap on the opposite side of the tent opens. Walking on two downturned arms and dragging a pair of underdeveloped legs is Harry the Human Crab. His flickering eyes appraise the crowd and land on the hecklers.

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB
Sounds like there's a very respectful bunch in here tonight.

A couple of Locals CHUCKLE. At present, the anomalous performer clambers onto the stage and faces the audience.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
Is the clown coming out? The one with the squirt guns?

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB
Nope.
(he eyes the crowd)
For my first trick-

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
Where can I find him?

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB
Please save all your questions for somebody who gives a shit.

Some Locals CHUCKLE, and the retired boxer frowns.

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB (CONT'D)
My first trick is called 'The Talking Cow Pie'.

Harry the Human Crab gestures at Right Hook Ronnie.

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB (CONT'D)
Voila!

A few people CHUCKLE at the insult. The retired boxer and his underlings glare at the anomalous performer.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
I wonder if you'd survive my right hook as well as you did your mother's trip to the abortion clinic.

A witty reply occurs to Harry the Human Crab while Right Hook Ronnie CRACKS his experienced knuckles. Wary of the retired boxer, the anomalous performer withholds an insult for the first time in his entire career.

INT. CIRCUS TENT - LATER

Dressed in a leather vest, blue jeans, and moccasins, Young Mountain throws a knife toward Paloma, who wears her beaded bikini skirt and matching top while bound to an upright board. The WHISTLING blade flashes in the spotlight and THUNKS into the wood. Maestro CRASHES a cymbal. Half of the one hundred and sixty LOCALS who are in attendance APPLAUD the throw, while various HECKLERS BOO and HISS. Seated on a rearmost bench are Gawky (the rock bar owner), Marshall (the big guy who knows Woodburn's father), and the four Bikers with whom they ride. Johnny and the black twins Duane and Tyrone are also in attendance.

PALOMA
And you forgot to put down the toilet seat.

Maestro plays a DRUMROLL in a dark corner as Young Mountain claims and flings another knife. The blade THUNKS into the wood beside Paloma's right hip, and a cymbal CRASHES. APPLAUSE and BOOS come from the mixed crowd.

REDNECK HECKLER
Didn't your chief ever show you how to scalp a squaw?

A score of Locals LAUGH at this remark, which is ignored by Young Mountain and Paloma. The target girl looks at the knife thrower, who then nods his head for her to continue.

PALOMA
Did you get me that new hat that I wanted?

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
Let me see...

Young Mountain turns to the table, claims another blade, and faces Paloma. Maestro plays DRUMROLL.

PLUMP HECKLER
Twenty bucks if you pop a tit!

Marshall raises his orange plastic megaphone to his mouth.

MARSHALL
A hundred for an ovary!

A lot of the audience LAUGHS at this one. The knife thrower and the target girl exchange looks of irritation, but do not directly acknowledge the Hecklers.

Light glints upon steel as Young Mountain raises and aims his blade. The DRUMROLL continues.

A shining metal can flies through the air and CLANKS against the red wooden board. Beer SPLASHES Paloma, and Locals LAUGH.

Decided, the knife thrower sets down his blade, walks across the dirt, and unfastens the ankles and wrists of his common-law wife, the target girl. People BOO and HISS.

Locals JEER and HOOT while Young Mountain and Paloma walk toward the rear flap. The spotlight abruptly swivels to the silver-haired Ringmaster, who is dressed in his striped blue suit and top hat. Contempt shines in his eyes as he appraises the belligerent audience.

RINGMASTER
Nickel Harrington, the owner of this circus, has asked me to urge all of the people in attendance to refrain from throwing things. Many of the-

A brown bag flies in the air, impacts the dirt, and disgorges popcorn near the Englishman. Locals LAUGH. Gawky, Marshall, and the Bikers CLAP. Preoccupied, Johnny, Duane, and Tyrone watch this unruly display with cold neutrality.

RINGMASTER (CONT'D)
If you are determined to entertain yourselves in a manner that renders us superfluous, we sh-

REDNECK HECKLER
Speak English!

GAWKY
The American kind!

RINGMASTER
If one more thing is thrown into the circle, we will end the show and shut down the big top.

PLUMP HECKLER
Fuck you!

RINGMASTER
Gesundheit.

REDNECK HECKLER
Suck my dick, fancy man!

RINGMASTER
You are welcome to teach profanity to the children in attendance so that they might one day match your eloquence, but do not throw anything into the circle.

The Ringmaster calmly appraises the crowd. Some oldsters, children, and parents CLAP, but that major part of the chastened group is irritated. At present, the Englishman nods his head at Maestro, who then begins playing a TRIBAL BEAT on his tom-toms. The lights dim.

RINGMASTER (CONT'D)
Our next performer shall present a compelling argument that the best way to achieve harmony is with a whip...

EXT. CAMPGROUNDS BEHIND THE CIRCUS TENT - SAME

The TRIBAL BEAT grows louder as Laughy emerges from the lean-to flap and enters the dark, uninhabited campgrounds.

Walking slowly forward, the clown puts a cigarette on his lips and withdraws a lighter from his mock military apparel. POUNDING TOM-TOMS sound from within the tent as his thumb SNAPS the flint wheel. Sparks flash, but the old metal lighter does not catch. The TRIBAL BEAT continues.

Frowning, Laughy walks past an orange trailer and thumbs his flint wheel again. A flame appears, and the clown leans his cigarette forward. POUNDING TOM-TOMS echo.

From the far side of this mobile home stride Right Hook Ronnie, Freddie, Cousin Dan, and Nephew. Each of these men wears a gas mask and holds a firearm. The former boxer advances ahead of his underlings and creeps toward the clown, who currently faces the other way. The tempo of the TRIBAL BEAT quickens.

Laughy exhales smoke and sees a reflection in his lighter of Right Hook Ronnie, who is stealthily approaching him from behind. POUNDING TOM-TOMS echo. Perspiration beads atop white face paint.

Calmly, the clown puts his lighter into his pocket and leaves his hand inside. The retired boxer raises his revolver until its muzzle is pointing at the back of his foe's head.

A whip CRACKS within the circus tent. Laughy and Right Hook Ronnie stiffen, but do not move. The TRIBAL BEAT changes into the sharp MILITARY MARCH that is the lion tamer's theme.

People APPLAUD. The clown sucks on his cigarette as the retired boxer thumbs his revolver's hammer, which CLICKS.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
Turn around, Mr. Funny Man.

The MILITARY MARCH continues. Exhaling smoke, Laughy turns around and sees the gun that Right Hook Ronnie now points at his face.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE (CONT'D)
Wanna hear a good joke?

Gunpowder EXPLODES as the clown fires the pistol that is hidden in his right pocket. The bullet impacts the retired boxer in the thigh and knocks him askew as he squeezes off his own shot, which BANGS. This round SLAMS into Laughy's left shoulder and spins him ninety degrees.

Turned away from each other, the clown and the retired boxer drop to their knees.

APPLAUSE sounds from within the circus tent as Laughy and Right Hook Ronnie raise their revolvers.

Forty feet away, Nephew levels shotgun, which BOOMS. Flying buckshot turns a painted white face into a mass of red dots. Blindly, the clown CRACKS off a wild shot, falls sideways, and THUDS upon the earth.

A DRUMROLL sounds within the tent. Freddie helps Right Hook Ronnie to his feet while Cousin Dan takes the gun from the right hand of Laughy, who lies on his back. A cymbal CRASHES, and a few people APPLAUD.

Wincing, the retired boxer clutches his shot left thigh, straightens his gas mask, and proceeds with the aid of his protege toward the clown.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE (CONT'D)
You shouldn't've pulled a gun on me. Especially in my store.

Laughy turns his blind, bleeding face toward Right Hook Ronnie, who stands three feet away.

LAUGHY
How about a grenade?

The clown plucks a plastic grenade from his bandolier.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
And you shouldn't make fun of the military. It's disrespectful.

LAUGHY
I served-
(he SPIT blood)
-and earned the right.

Disbelief shows in the retired boxer's eyes.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
Bullshit.

LAUGHY
24th Infantry. Korea.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
I was in the 78th Antiaircraft. How many yellow niggers did you kill?

Laughy CLICKS a button on the plastic grenade; a stiletto springs from the top that he stabs into Right Hook Ronnie's groin. YELLING, the retired boxer stumbles backward.

LAUGHY
Just one dumb white one.

Cousin Dan squeezes the trigger of his pistol. Gunpowder BOOMS, and the point blank shot tears through Laughy and SPLATTERS his brains on the dirt. The dead clown falls over.

Agonized, the retired boxer THUDS onto his side and GROANS.

FREDDIE
Ronnie. Hold st-

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Hello?

Freddie, Cousin Dan, and Nephew turn to the speaker. Standing in the doorway of the aquamarine trailer and looking in a different direction are Caramel and Wendy.

A cymbal CRASHES in the tent. Boots STAMP the dirt as three men in gas masks run through the shadows at the dancers.

INT. CIRCUS TENT - SAME

Zulu ROARS and swats a big paw at the khaki-clad lion tamer Johnson, who faces the male and two females within the spotlighted cage.

REDNECK HECKLER
Rip off his face!

A couple of Locals APPLAUD this notion, but the lion tamer does not remove his attention from the nearest beast. His whip comes up, WHISTLES, and CRACKS in the air.

JOHNSON
Zulu, come!

Again the whip CRACKS in the air. Johnson motions toward the large plastic sports car that sits on the far side of the cage. GROWLING, the male lion rises. Thick sinews and thicker bones shift underneath his golden coat as he stalks toward the toy vehicle.

Standing behind the bleachers are a CHUBBY BOY of twelve and his REDHEADED FRIEND. The former digs into his right pocket and removes a cherry bomb that has a long green fuse while the latter withdraws a soggy matchbook.

INT. WOODBURN'S MOTORHOME - SAME

CLASSICAL PIANO MUSIC issues from the speakers within the dark motorhome, where Woodburn currently sits in the driver's seat. His broken nose is purple as are his bandaged right cheek and busted lips. The strongman has showered and dressed in a fresh clothing (an undershirt, a steel chain, and cut-off jeans) for his upcoming performance.

PIANO KEYS TINKLE. Staring at the risen half moon, the strongman ponders his break up with Wendy, his unpleasant encounter with the biker in the rock bar, his erroneous assumptions about the pair of visiting businessmen, the death of his childhood sweetheart, the unsatisfying tryst with Heather, the beating given to him by Sheriff Jorgenson, the violence inflicted by Pinebranch locals upon Laughy and the Crewmen, and the slap that the dancer gave his busted face. The results of these unhappy recollections are anger, remorse, and two hard fists upon the wheel.

PIANO KEYS TINKLE as Woodburn broods. His right hand tests the broken nose that his ex-girlfriend slapped, and he INHALES the lingering scent of her perfume.

The music comes to a CADENCE and then ends. Quiet HISSING follows until the tape player CLICKS. Silence expands throughout the dark motorhome.

Woodburn nods his head: His decision has finally been made. The strongman rises to his feet, walks to the back of his trailer, opens a cupboard, and reaches his right hand behind a box of cereal.

EXT. CAMPGROUNDS BEHIND THE CIRCUS TENT - SAME

FOOTFALLS sound within Woodburn's brown and tan motorhome, and a lock CLICKS. The door swings wide. Out of the dark interior and into the silver moonlight strides the strongman. Held in his right hand is a heart-shaped box of chocolates.

Woodburn descends the steps and arches his back. His spine and various joints CRACKLE.

At present, the strongman walks into the uninhabited campgrounds. His strides take him past several dark motorhomes, two trash cans, and the empty lions' cages.

Upon reaching the food tent, Woodburn slows his pace. Fifty feet ahead of him stands the aquamarine trailer. A light shines behind the curtained side window of this mobile home.

The strongman hears something CRINKLE, wrinkles his brow, and looks down. His fingers have crushed the edges of the heart-shaped box of chocolates.

WOODBURN
(muttered)
Balls.

Woodburn smooths out the damaged box, takes a deep breath, and strides toward the aquamarine trailer. Grass CRUNCHES underneath his sneakers, and something CREAKS.

The strongman pauses. Fifteen feet stand between him and the side door of the mobile home. A deep, unintelligible WHISPER sounds behind its walls.

Woodburn traverses the remaining distance, makes a fist, and KNOCKS on the door.

WOODBURN (CONT'D)
Wendy?

No response comes from within the aquamarine trailer. Silence thickens the air.

INT. AQUAMARINE TRAILER - SAME

Four gas masks sit on a table in the aquamarine trailer, where Laughy is sprawled dead in a chair. Torn robes are wrapped around the heads of Caramel and Wendy, both of whom are handcuffed and nude upon the floor. Cousin Dan has lowered his jeans and inserted himself between the forcibly spread legs of the black dancer while Nephew sodomizes the blond one who earlier put four bloody scratches on his face. Right Hook Ronnie is on the sofa with his pants down for Freddie, who is stitching up his stiletto-sliced scrotum with blue thread.

All four men turn to look at the door of the trailer, behind which stands the visitor who just called out.

Again, Woodburn KNOCKS.

Right Hook Ronnie pushes Freddie's hands away and trails thread from his scrotum as he walks over to Nephew, who is still violating Wendy from behind. The retired boxer pulls up his underwear, shoves the chinless rapist off of the blond dancer, and unwraps her head. Two big candles fill her mouth, and her eyes are wide with terror.

Right Hook Ronnie nods his head at Nephew, who then places the muzzle of his shotgun between Wendy's legs.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
(whispered)
Make it snug.

The chinless rapist lifts the shotgun, SPITS on the palm of his right hand, wipes the barrel, presses the lubricated muzzle between the blond dancer's legs, adjusts the angle, and inserts four inches into her vaginal canal.

Horrified, Wendy shakes her head back and forth.

WOODBURN (O.S.)
Wendy...? Are you in there?

All four men reclaim and don their gas masks. Freddie and Cousin Dan point their firearms at the door while Right Hook Ronnie leans close to Wendy.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
(whispered)
Make him go away or we will.

Right Hook Ronnie withdraws the thick candles from Wendy's mouth. Her teeth dig furrows into the wax.

Nephew jabs the shotgun deeper. Wendy GRUNTS, SPITS bloody scrapings from her mouth, and faces the door.

WENDY
Go away.

WOODBURN (O.S.)
I wanna talk. I made a mistake--a bunch of them--but-

WENDY
I don't wanna talk to you.

Freddie and Cousin Dan keep their weapons trained on the door while Right Hook Ronnie and Nephew monitor Wendy.

WOODBURN (O.S.)
You're sure?

WENDY
Yeah.
(she SNIFFLES)
It's too late to change anything.

Tears roll down the cheeks of the blond dancer, whose eyes are fixed upon the guns that point toward the door. At present, she finds a reserve of inner strength and strengthens her voice.

WENDY (CONT'D)
Go away, Chad. It's over.

EXT. CAMPGROUNDS BEHIND THE CIRCUS TENT - SAME

Frustrated, Woodburn stares at the closed door of the aquamarine trailer.

WOODBURN
If that's how you feel, okay.
But can I at least apologize to you face to face?

No answer comes from within the mobile home. A short amount of time passes by very slowly for the strongman.

WOODBURN (CONT'D)
Well then I'll say it to the door.
I fucked up. And I'm sorry for not trusting you better.

Woodburn gently tosses the heart-shaped box of chocolates at the bottom step, where it lands with a CLANG.

INT. AQUAMARINE TRAILER - SAME

All four men point their guns at the door. Right Hook Ronnie jams candles into Wendy's mouth. Ready to fire, the retired boxer and his underlings wait.

EXT. CAMPGROUNDS BEHIND THE CIRCUS TENT - SAME

Embittered, Woodburn turns away from the aquamarine trailer and starts to walk toward the big top.

WOODBURN
Balls.

His mind replays the unpleasant interaction, which feels like yet another weighty cinder block piled upon his shoulders.

INT. AQUAMARINE TRAILER - SAME

Wendy strains to keep herself together while Right Hook Ronnie, Freddie, Cousin Dan, and Nephew crouch in their respective positions and watch the door over their raised guns. Skeptical, the former boxer eyes the chinless rapist.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
(whispered)
Take a gander.

New fears fill the blond dancer as this selected underling rises to his feet with his shotgun.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE (CONT'D)
(whispered)
If you see anyone, shoot.

Wendy spits the candles from her mouth, heaves her handcuffed body forward, and bites Nephew's calf. Bared teeth RIP through cloth into skin and muscle.

Suppressing a yell, the chinless rapist spins and SLAMS the stock of his shotgun into the blond dancer's face.

Wendy falls back and kicks out at Nephew. Her feet SMACK his ankles. Unbalanced, the chinless rapist THUDS on the floor.

Furious, Wendy flings herself forward and bites Nephew's right wrist. The shotgun CLATTERS on the ground.

Right Hook Ronnie CRACKS his gun handle against Wendy's skull. Instantly unconscious, the blond dancer collapses. Blood that is not her own darkens her teeth and chin.

EXT. CAMPGROUNDS BEHIND THE CIRCUS TENT - SAME

Brooding, Woodburn reaches the far side of this campground area and notices something in the grass. Five strides bring him closer to this anomaly, which is a bright red squirt gun.

Brow wrinkled, the strongman picks up the toy weapon and looks around the campgrounds for the clown.

INT. CIRCUS TENT - SAME

The big top spotlight shines upon the animal cage. Two female lionesses calmly approach Zulu, who is currently seated in the toy car. Gesturing broadly, Johnson faces the crowd.

JOHNSON
Even ferocious, four-legged ladies appreciate a man in a fancy car.

A couple of Locals CHUCKLE. Standing behind the seated audience, the Chubby Boy drops a lighted, HISSING cherry bomb on the ground. His Redheaded Friend kicks the smoking firework, which then rolls under the bleachers.

The lionesses near the YAWNING male, who still sits in the plastic car. His right paw HONKS the horn at the ladies, and some Locals CLAP.

Underneath the bleachers, HISSING sparks consume the wick and reach the bomb, which then EXPLODES.

Lions ROAR. Startled Locals who were sitting above the explosion SHOUT and YELP and scramble in all directions.

A GROWLING female beast bolts directly at the lion tamer, who dodges out of the way. The male leaps from the toy car, upends the vehicle, and ROARS.

Wisps of smoke rise from underneath the bleachers, and the panicked crowd grows calmer.

OLD MAN
It was just a firecracker!

Furious, Johnson eyes the rear flap and shakes his head.

INT. PERFORMERS' LEAN-TO / ADJOINING THE CIRCUS TENT - SAME

The Ringmaster nods his head in reply and looks back from the opening toward Nickel, who is running into the lean-to from the other direction.

NICKEL
Is everybody okay?

RINGMASTER
Nobody was hurt, but the lion tamer has just capitulated to Pinebranch.
(he gestures to the exit)
Did you find Laughy?

NICKEL
No. Go kill time while I fetch Woodburn.

EXT. CAMPGROUNDS BEHIND THE CIRCUS TENT - SAME

Holding the red squirt gun and brooding, Woodburn walks toward the lean-to from which Nickel is currently exiting. The diminutive boss sees the strongman.

NICKEL
Good--you're here. Have you seen Laughy?

WOODBURN
Nope. Though I found this by the food tent-

Woodburn tosses the cherry red squirt gun to Nickel, who catches the toy weapon.

NICKEL
Okay.
(he gestures to the tent)
You're on.

The strongman nods an affirmation and proceeds toward the big top. His strides soon carry him inside.

Concerned about the missing clown, the diminutive boss walks further into the campgrounds. His hard-soled shoes CRINKLE blades of grass.

Nickel pockets the squirt gun and withdraws a semiautomatic from his coat as he continues forward. Grass CRINKLES underfoot. Wary, the diminutive boss passes by several dark trailers and approaches the empty food tent. Something quietly CREAKS.

Nickel scans the vicinity and fixes his gaze upon the aquamarine trailer, the curtained window of which glows with light. Cautiously (but not fearfully), he strides toward this mobile home, which CREAKS in a steady sexual rhythm.

Understanding comes to the diminutive boss, who relaxes his guard as he continues forward. His semiautomatic dangles in his right hand, and blades of grass CRINKLE underfoot.

At present, Nickel reaches the aquamarine trailer, climbs the steps, and KNOCKS on the door.

NICKEL (CONT'D)
Clementine? Caramel...?

A woman COUGHS within the mobile home.

CARAMEL (O.S.)
(weakly)
Yeah...?

NICKEL
I've said before that you girls shouldn't hook, right?

CARAMEL (O.S.)
Right.

NICKEL
And I've also said if you do--
against my wishes and regardless of
the very fair wages that I pay--I
get how much?

CARAMEL (O.S.)
Fifteen percent.

NICKEL
Right. Remember that.
Is Laughy in there? I'm looking for
him.

CARAMEL (O.S.)
Nope. It's just-
(her voice cracks)
It's just m-me and a l-local guy.

Concerned, Nickel stares at the door.

NICKEL
Is everything okay in there?

No response comes from within the aquamarine trailer.

The diminutive boss raises his semiautomatic and looks at the curtained window, which is six feet from the ground.

INT. AQUAMARINE TRAILER - SAME

Laughy sits dead at the kitchenette table. Wendy writhes mutely in her final death throes while blood pours out of her sliced-open throat. Tears pour down the face of Caramel, who is prostrated on the rug underneath Cousin Dan. Right Hook Ronnie, Freddie, and Nephew all wear their gas masks and point their guns at the door, behind which stands Nickel.

The black dancer starts to SOB, and the bearded underling who pins her to the ground CLAPS his hand over her mouth.

NICKEL (O.S.)
Caramel. Get dressed and open up
right now.

The retired boxer nods at his muscular protege, who then pads toward the door with his raised revolver. A CREAK sounds.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE (O.S.)
(whispered)
Mind your footwork.

Cousin Dan jams a crushed soda can into Caramel's mouth and wraps her white robe around her head.

Right Hook Ronnie monitors Freddie, who is quietly approaching the door. Nephew looks at the window and pales.

NEPHEW
There's-

A GUNSHOT flashes, and the window SHATTERS. The curtains SNAP out of the way as the blind shot CRACKS into the ceiling.

Right Hook Ronnie, Nephew, and Freddie swing their guns to the window as Nickel squeezes off three shots.

The first bullet CRACKS into Cousin Dan's head and knocks him off of Caramel. The second shot SHATTERS a television, and the third one WHACKS Right Hook Ronnie in the right shoulder.

Freddie and Nephew return fire. Gunpowder BOOMS.

One bullet SCRAPES across Nickel's face, and a second shot SMACKS into his right shoulder.

EXT. CAMPGROUNDS BEHIND THE CIRCUS TENT - SAME

Knocked from the top of an overturned garbage can, the diminutive boss falls and THUDS upon his back. For one full second, there is quiet outside of the aquamarine trailer.

The side door of BURSTS open. Freddie appears and aims his revolver while Nickel WHEEZES and raises his semiautomatic.

Gunshots BOOM. A bullet WHISTLES wide of the muscular protege while his shots CRACK the chest of the diminutive boss. The semiautomatic THUDS on the ground.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE (O.S.)
Bring that midget Jew inside.

Still wearing the gas mask, Freddie scans the area, claims the dropped semiautomatic, grabs Nickel by the left leg, and drags him up the stairs, which SMACK, SMACK, SMACK against his upsidedown head.

INT. AQUAMARINE TRAILER - SAME

The diminutive boss is pulled into the aquamarine trailer by the muscular protege, who then closes and locks the door.

Sitting upon the sofa and no longer masked is Right Hook Ronnie, who holds his shot shoulder while glaring at Nickel.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
Where do you keep your money,
little man?

NICKEL
In a city up north that's called
Fuck You.

The diminutive boss WHEEZES and COUGHS up blood.

NICKEL (CONT'D)
Ever been?

Unsheathing a sizable hunting knife, the chinless rapist nods his head.

NEPHEW
I'll get the info.

NICKEL
You think you can break a man-
(he WHEEZES)
-who's been trapped in a kid's body for fifty-eight years...?

Nickel CHUCKLES, COUGHS blood, and eyes Right Hook Ronnie.

NICKEL (CONT'D)
How'd you know I was Jewish?

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
You're in entertainment and use a fake name.

NICKEL
I'm glad it wasn't-
(he WHEEZES)
-my nose.

The retired boxer nods to the chinless rapist, who then plunges his knife into the chest of the diminutive boss.

INT. CIRCUS TENT - SAME

The lions and their tamer are gone from the big top. Walking slowly forward, the Ringmaster returns to the spotlight. Unfriendly eyes sit atop a false grin as the Englishman scans the restive crowd.

RINGMASTER
Hello once again, you lovely and considerate people.

This salutation resounds amongst people who are largely immune to irony.

RINGMASTER (CONT'D)
If another explosive of any kind is detonated, we will stop the show. It is surprising that I would need to make an announcement such as this to a room full of ostensible human beings, but the people of Pinebranch have proven to be very surprising thus far.
And don't mistake that for a compliment!

Maestro plays a RIMSHOT. At present, the long-haired fellow puts down his sticks, claims his wind instrument, and plays a SLOW, DEEP TRUMPET MELODY.

RINGMASTER (CONT'D)
That dire melody is the theme of our next performer, a man whose manner of dealing with cinder blocks, iron bars, and household appliances should not exceed your cerebral capacities.
(he gestures expansively)
Ladies and gentlemen, creatures of Pinebranch, allow me to introduce Chad the Strongman...

The spotlight shifts from the Ringmaster to the rear flap, where Woodburn soon appears. Maestro blasts the SLOW, DEEP TRUMPET MELODY again, and a third of the Locals APPLAUD.

Heather's embittered ex-boyfriend Johnny exchanges meaningful glances with the black twins, Duane and Tyrone, while at the back of a different section, smirks appear on the faces of Marshall, Gawky, and the four Bikers. The tattooed leader of this group once again picks up his orange plastic megaphone.

The SLOW, DEEP TRUMPET MELODY is replayed as the strongman ushers the spotlight toward the cinder blocks, barbell, telephone book, crowbar, and stainless steel toaster that he uses in his act. The chain that thrice encircles his waist CLINKS with each stride.

The SLOW, DEEP TRUMPET MELODY is replaced by a DRUMROLL as Woodburn picks up the phone book.

Sitting in the back row of the center bleachers, Marshall raises the megaphone to his mouth.

MARSHALL
(through the megaphone)
What the ringmaster didn't tell you was that Chad's last name is Woodburn, and that he's Elias Woodburn's son.

MUTTERS ripple through the crowd, and a lot of neutral faces turn sour as they look upon the strongman.

Maestro continues his DRUMROLL. Woodburn clasps the telephone book upon its unbound side and tightens his grip. Muscles knot as he strains to tear the book in half.

MARSHALL (CONT'D)
(through the megaphone)
Yep! That's Elias's son all growed up right there before your eyes. The fine, upstanding boy who put his old man in a wheelchair.

Ignoring these provocations, the strongman applies more force to his hands, which rigidly grip the telephone book. Muscles and arteries bulge as the DRUMROLL continues.

MARSHALL (CONT'D)
(through the megaphone)
Elias was a mean father and probably deserved a beating from his boy Chad, but I don't think he deserved to have his spine broken into pieces with a crowbar.

Uncomfortable with this harangue, the crowd grows silent. Sweat DRIPS onto the dirt as Woodburn strains his muscles.

MARSHALL (CONT'D)
(through the megaphone)
That seems a bit excessive.

The strongman GRUNTS and RIPS the telephone book into two halves, which he then tosses aside. Fluttering, the torn hunks arc through the air and THUD upon the ground.

A CYMBAL CRASHES, and a few Locals CLAP.

MARSHALL (CONT'D)
(through the megaphone)
Well just look at what that angry son of a bitch can do!

Gawky, the Bikers, and a few ROUGH GUYS CHUCKLE, but most of the uncomfortable crowd remains silent.

MARSHALL (CONT'D)
(through the megaphone)
How many of you remember him mama, Carol Woodburn?

A score of guys who are in their fifties and sixties CHUCKLE or grin or flush red upon hearing this woman's name.

Down in the performing circle, the strongman picks up a crowbar. Another DRUMROLL begins.

MARSHALL (CONT'D)
(through the megaphone)
In a big city like New York or Chicago, they'd call her a street walker. But as most of you all know, Pinebranch is mostly dirt roads.

GAWKY
Real dirty!

A score of people CHUCKLE. Several parents glance at Marshall. Bristling, one CONCERNED FATHER turns around in his seat and directly faces the tattooed leader.

CONCERNED FATHER
That's enough trash talk for tonight. There're kids here.

MARSHALL
It's time to take 'em for cotton candy.

CONCERNED FATHER
Go have your fun somewhere else. This is a-

MARSHALL
Don't you dare give me orders.

Marshall, Gawky, and the four Bikers stand up and glare at the Concerned Father, who grows pale.

MARSHALL (CONT'D)
Fuck you, fuck your ugly wife, and fuck your retarded kids.

Frightened, the Concerned Father and a dozen other PARENTS rise from their seats, escort their CHILDREN to the aisles, and proceed down the steps.

The DRUMROLL continues as Woodburn sets the middle of the crowbar against his forehead and pulls upon either end. His muscles knot, and he GRUNTS.

Parents and children vacate the bleachers as Marshall, Gawky, and the Bikers reseat themselves. Once again, the tattooed leader picks up the orange megaphone and returns his attention to the strongman.

MARSHALL (CONT'D)
(through the megaphone)
I fucked Carol Woodburn eight or nine times.

This proclamation echoes throughout the big top. Ignoring these words to the best of his ability, Woodburn pits his burning muscles against iron. The DRUMROLL continues.

MARSHALL (CONT'D)
(through the megaphone)
Chad's mama didn't care what you did to her, but she wouldn't take money that was dirty or wrinkled. I'm not sure why, but those bills that you gave her had to be crisp-- like from a bank.
(he nods his head)
Carol Woodburn had standards.

A dozen men CHUCKLE at this comment as the DRUMROLL continues. Jaw clenched and muscles knotted, the strongman starts to bend the crowbar against his head. A drop of blood trickles from the intersection of flesh and metal.

MARSHALL (CONT'D)
(through the megaphone)
Ten dollars is what she charged.
Unless she just sucked me off.

ROARING, Woodburn bends the crowbar in half. A streak of blood runs down the middle of his face.

MARSHALL (CONT'D)
(through the megaphone)
That costed five.

The strongman casts aside the bent iron, which then CLANGS upon the ground. A cymbal CRASHES. The uncomfortable Locals are silent, excepting Gawky, the Bikers, and a score of other ROUGH GUYS, who CLAP and CHUCKLE antagonistically.

Suppressing a tidal wave of anger, Woodburn wipes blood from his eyes, glares at Marshall, and walks toward the pile of cinder blocks.

MARSHALL (CONT'D)
(through the megaphone)
I've got a question for you Chad--
something I've always wondered
'bout...
Was it because you crippled your
daddy that your mama became a
whore?

Furious, Woodburn grabs a cinder block, spins toward the audience, and prepares to hurl the concrete unit. Terrified Locals hasten out of the way.

RINGMASTER
Wait!

MAESTRO
Stop! Woodburn!

Maestro and the Ringmaster run toward Woodburn, who has not yet thrown the thirty-three pound cinder block that he holds aloft in the spotlight.

Locals scatter, though Marshall, Gawky, and the Bikers do not move from their seats upon the rearmost bench.

Sense returns to Woodburn, who turns away from the crowd and hurls the cinder block at the pile. Concrete BURSTS into a welter of spinning hunks.

Dripping sweat and blood, Woodburn leaves the spotlight, passes by Maestro and the Ringmaster, and proceeds toward the rear flap.

Heather's ex-boyfriend Johnny and the black twins Duane and Tyrone leave their seats and head for the main exit.

Marshall, Gawky, and the Bikers start to APPLAUD as Woodburn reaches the rear flap. Thirty Rough Guys also CLAP.

MARSHALL
(through the megaphone)
Bravo!

Woodburn disappears, and the Ringmaster reenters the spotlight. His stern face no longer supports a fake smile.

INT. PERFORMERS' LEAN-TO / ADJOINING THE CIRCUS TENT - SAME

Sweaty and bloody, Woodburn enters the lean-to, picks up a stool, and pulls its legs in different directions. Wood CREAKS, SNAPS, and SHATTERS.

The strongman discards the destroyed furniture and storms toward the rear exit as a Crewman escorts inside the tightrope walkers, Beniamo and Grazia Ritornelli.

EXT. CAMPGROUNDS BEHIND THE CIRCUS TENT - SAME

Woodburn strides through the flap and out into the moonlit night. Humid air surrounds him, and fresh sweat beads upon his face. Jaw clenched, he circumvents a few trailers and walks along the shadowy path that leads to his brown and tan motorhome. His right hands unwinds the CLINKING chain from around his stomach.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
Chad.

The strongman turns around. Brass knuckles glimmer in the moonlight and POUND his broken nose, which CRUNCHES.

Pain explodes in Woodburn's skull, and he stumbles backward. RATTLING, the chain falls upon the ground.

Tyrone throws a right hook as Duane fires a jab. Brass knuckles CRACK against the strongman's jaw, and a hard fist SLAMS into his stomach. Air WHOOSHES from flattened lungs.

Unable to see clearly or breathe, the strongman lowers his head and rushes at his opponents.

Johnny steps in from the side and extends his left leg. Woodburn trips, falls forward, and THUDS against the ground.

Pained, unable to breathe, and with limited eyesight, the strongman rolls onto his back and starts to rise.

Duane grabs one of Woodburn's arms, and Tyrone seizes the other. Together, they shove their opponent backwards and down to the ground.

Johnny withdraws his switchblade, which he then thumbs. Metal CLICKS, and a piece of moonlight that is shaped like a knife extends from the mustached fellow's right hand.

JOHNNY
You think that-

GRUNTING, Woodburn whips his arms together. Duane SMACKS his skull against Tyrone's chin.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)
Hold him down!

Again, the twins throw their bodies onto the arms of their opponent and force him to the ground. The one-eared brother SLAMS his elbow into the strongman's throat.

DUANE
(to Johnny)
Stick him if you're gonna!

Johnny thrusts his switchblade at Woodburn's exposed stomach. GRUNTING, the strongman shifts to the right. The knife stabs his left side.

GRUNTING, Woodburn tightens his abdominal muscles and twists his body. The blade SNAPS off at the handle.

ROARING, the strongman heaves one twin on top of the other and starts to rise.

Johnny's right knee SLAMS into Woodburn's smashed nose, which CRUNCHES as it breaks for the third time that day. Agony fills the strongman as the twins regain their footing.

A jab POUNDS Woodburn's shorn left ear, and brass knuckles CRACK against the back of his skull.

Staggered, the strongman drops to his knees. Pain and anger are all that keep him conscious.

Duane and Tyrone hold their injuries and look around for witnesses as they walk over to Johnny, who now stands directly in front of Woodburn.

JOHNNY
This's what happens to guys who think they're above it all.

WOODBURN
Doesn't change the fact that Heather still wants someone better than you.

Furious, the mustached fellow kicks the strongman in the head. The CRACK of this brutal impact resounds.

Hoping that this terrible day has finally come to its conclusion, Woodburn relinquishes consciousness, falls forward, and THUDS upon the dirt.

INT. PERFORMERS' LEAN-TO / ADJOINING THE CIRCUS TENT - SAME

Two sweating and PANTING Crewmen hasten into the lean-to, where Young Mountain, Paloma, and Johnson stand beside the inner flap and watch the crowd.

JOHNSON
This isn't safe. Mr. Harrington should shut it down.

CREWMAN
Me and my guys can't find him anywhere.

INT. CIRCUS TENT - SAME

The Ringmaster eyes the one hundred Locals who comprise the remaining audience, a mixture of churlish kids and mean adults. Less than ten women are present.

RINGMASTER
If there is one more instance of misconduct of any kind, we will stop the show.

Contended smirks sit upon the faces of Marshall, Gawky, and the Bikers as well as some Hecklers and Rough Guys, but nobody says anything.

RINGMASTER (CONT'D)
Our next performers will face a nemesis that is as harsh and unforgiving as the mouth of Pinebranch citizen--and that foe is gravity.

Skeptical, the Ringmaster nods a cue. Maestro blasts a TRUMPET FANFARE. The spotlight swings to the good-looking Italian cousins Grazia and Beniamo Ritornelli, both of whom wear black and purple leotards while standing atop a tightrope perch that is fifty-five feet above the safety net.

RINGMASTER (CONT'D)
The Fearless Ritornellis!

The musician plays the TRUMPET FANFARE once again and CRASHES a cymbal with a mallet. A few people APPLAUD.

Maestro discards the brass, raises an accordion, and starts to play PEPPY MUSIC.

Beniamo walks upon tightrope, pauses in the middle, and turns around to face Grazia. Ponytails bob as the loving cousins nod at each other.

The PEPPY ACCORDION MUSIC modulates up one octave. Derisive comments are MUTTERED throughout the crowd, and a few Rough Guys CHUCKLE.

ROUGH GUY
This act's for little kids.

The PEPPY ACCORDION MUSIC continues. Sitting on the rearmost bench, buzzed, and nursing a whisky flask, Gawky thinks of something and looks at Marshall.

GAWKY
Do you think you could hit that Italian from here?
If you threw something?

MARSHALL
Doubt it.

Disappointed, the bartender takes another swig and surveys the crowd. His gaze fixes upon someone of significance who sits four rows further up in the adjacent section.

GAWKY
You think Chet could? He was pretty good when he was in the minors.

MARSHALL
Don’t think he’s got his arm anymore.

Beniamo Ritornelli walks the tightrope in time with the PEPPY ACCORDION MUSIC as Gawky gestures to the sixth row of the adjacent section, where sits CHET, a broad-shouldered fellow whose potbelly, graying hair, and bloodshot eyes show that he is no longer in prime athletic condition.

GAWKY
Chet!

The ballplayer turns around to face the bartender.

GAWKY (CONT’D)
Y’think think that left arm of yours could knock this Italian off his wire?

Chet looks up at the tightrope act and makes an appraisal.

CHET
Sure could.

GAWKY
Think you could you beam him with this?-

Gawky withdraws and upholds an unopened beer can.

CHET
Probably...though a baseball would be a sure thing.

The bartender tosses the drink to the ballplayer, who catches the lob and shakes his head.

CHET (CONT’D)
I don’t wanna hurt the guy.

GAWKY
He’s got that net below to catch him.

Holding the beer can, Chet ruminates. PEPPY ACCORDION MUSIC plays as Grazia walks backwards upon the tightrope toward the open arms of Beniamo.

CHET
I'd better not.

GAWKY
C'mon.

MARSHALL
Leave him be, Gawky. That has-been couldn't do it nohow.

Bristling, Chet looks at Marshall.

CHET
I've still got my arm.

MARSHALL
Fifty bucks says you don't.

A score of people watch the tattooed leader and the ballplayer eye each other. Neither man says anything, but an agreement is made nonetheless.

A cymbal CRASHES, and a dozen people CLAP. Maestro drops the mallet and plays SLOW WALTZ MUSIC upon his accordion.

Atop the high wire, Beniamo takes Grazia's upraised left hand and curls his right arm around her lower back. The loving cousins carefully dance in time with the music.

GRAZIA
(in Italian)
Why are people in the South so angry?
Is it because they lost the war?

BENIAMO
(in Italian)
I read that the mosquitos down here have a virus that drives them crazy.

Synchronized with the SLOW WALTZ MUSIC, the Italian man dances backwards and gently pulls his partner forward. Nimble feet shuffle upon the wire.

GRAZIA
(in Italian)
These people make me nervous.

BENIAMO
(in Italian)
Just pretend that we are rehearsing back in Naples.

Recalling these fond memories, Grazia grins and relaxes.

GRAZIA
(in Italian)
Thank you.

The Ritornellis retreat in time to the SLOW WALTZ MUSIC and pause in the exact middle of the tightrope. Grazia arches backward as Beniamo leans forward. The latter kisses the former on the lips. The SLOW WALTZ MUSIC swells and lands on a lovely chord.

The Italian man raises his head, and something glimmers in his peripheral vision. People YELL and SHOUT. Abruptly, the accordion music stops.

MAESTRO
Look out!

Beniamo turns his head, and a thrown beer can SMACKS him in the face. Grazia SCREAMS.

Knocked from the tightrope, the Italian fellow unconsciously pulls his partner into the air.

Grazia and Beniamo look down and see that they are going to miss the net. Locals GASP and SHOUT; a few SCREAM.

GRAZIA
(in Italian)
I love you.

Tear-eyed, the Italian fellow pulls his lover to his chest and cradles her there as they plummet toward the dirt floor.

Beniamo’s head SLAMS into the ground, and his neck CRACKS. His ribs SHATTER underneath Grazia, who SCREAMS as her back SNAPS in half. A torrent of blood bursts from her open mouth.

Shocked by the event, Locals GASP, MUTTER, and rise to their feet. Marshall, Gawky, the Bikers, and Chet calmly stand up.

People hasten to the aisles and begin their exodus. Boots, shoes, and sneakers TATTOO thunderously in the bleachers.

Maestro runs toward the dead and dying Ritornellis while the Ringmaster, Young Mountain, Johnson, and two crowbar-wielding Crewmen hasten from the rear flap toward the fleeing Locals.

RINGMASTER
Stop running at once!

YOUNG MOUNTAIN
Who threw that can!?!

The performers are ignored. Frustrated, the Englishman withdraws a derringer two-shot from his vest and points the muzzle up.

RINGMASTER
Stop, I said!

The Ringmaster squeezes the trigger. GUNPOWDER BOOMS. A score of Locals turn around, but the major part of the crowd continues to speed toward the entrance.

RINGMASTER (CONT'D)
Nobody leaves this tent until-

A GUNSHOT flashes within the fleeing crowd. The Ringmaster GRUNTS, stumbles backward, and grips his perforated stomach. Disbelief and pain show upon the veteran performer's face.

Young Mountain flings a knife. The blade pierces the right eye of a Rough Guy who holds a smoking gun. YELLING, the man falls backward. Several fleeing Locals see this violence and decide to stay and fight.

A second Rough Guy claims his fallen buddy's gun. Young Mountain flings another knife. This blade spears the fellow in the neck. YELLING, the injured man points his revolver at the knife thrower and squeezes the trigger. GUNSHOTS flash.

Young Mountain GRUNTS as two bullets impact his chest. His back SLAMS against the dirt, and the ground POUNDS his skull. Abruptly, the knife thrower blacks out. Paloma SCREAMS as she runs out of the lean-to.

A Crewman swings a crowbar at the head of the Plump Heckler and CRACKS his skull. The Teenaged peer of this battered fellow tackles the Mexican and chokes him with his hands.

Eyes filled with tears, Paloma kisses Young Mountain on the mouth, grabs his remaining knife, and scans the bedlam. Amongst the Locals she sees a Rough Guy who is pulling a throwing blade out of his neck. Maddened, the Mexican target girl runs at her husband's attacker, whose back is exposed.

LOCAL
Wade! Behind ya!

Turning around, the Rough Guy sees Paloma and aims his revolver. The knife in her right hand plunges into his mouth, through his tongue, and out of the bottom of his chin half of a second before gunpowder EXPLODES in her SCREAMING face.

Walking calmly toward the exit, Marshall gives Chet a fifty dollar bill and looks at Gawky and the Bikers.

MARSHALL
Let's get our horses.

INT. AQUAMARINE TRAILER - MOMENTS LATER

Inside of the aquamarine trailer, Freddie pulls on a gas mask and slings the plump corpse of Cousin Dan over his shoulders. Nephew wipes blood from his scratched face as he carries a SLOSHING cannister of gasoline from the rear of the mobile home to the neatly arranged bodies of Laughy, Nickel, Caramel, and Wendy.

Wincing, Right Hook Ronnie dons his gas mask, grips his shot shoulder, and limps on his bandaged left leg while being careful not to tear the stitches in his recently sewn scrotum.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
Burn them till they're nigger black and then drive this thing into the lake.

NEPHEW
Sure thing.

The chinless rapist removes the cap from the cannister, extends the nozzle, and SPLASHES gasoline on the staring faces of Laughy, Nickel, Caramel, and Wendy. Fluid fills the gaping mouths of the dead.

GRUNTING in pain, Right Hook Ronnie opens the door. YELLS and GUNSHOTS sound in the distance.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
Sounds like a party out there.

EXT. CIRCUS MIDWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Locals scramble pell-mell up the midway toward their parked cars. Clementine tightens a robe around herself, leaves Barrel in the 'Belly Buster' booth, and hastens toward the campground. Her flight is noticed by the retired baseball player Chet, who then turns around and follows after her.

CHET
Remember me from the show last night?

Engines ROAR as Marshall, Gawky, and the four Bikers race their motorcycles up the circus midway. Held in the riders' hands are baseball bats and two gasoline cans. At present, the sextet speeds toward The Exhibition of Bizarre Horrors.

INT. SHOWCASE ROOM / THE EXHIBITION OF BIZARRE HORRORS - SAME

Engines ROAR. Upon the sideshow stage, Harry the Human Crab and Dirty Rita monitor the west side of the tent, which brightens as the headlights of oncoming motorcycles draw nearer. The anomalous performer aims a sawed-off shotgun.

EXT. CAMPGROUNDS BEHIND THE CIRCUS TENT - SAME

YELLS and SHOUTS infiltrate the unconscious mind of Woodburn, who lies in the campground exactly where he fell after being ambushed and beaten by Johnny, Duane, and Tyrone. A distant BOOMING gunshot startles the battered strongman. His eyelids flicker, and he stirs. SHOUTS echo.

Dizzy and disoriented, Woodburn rises to his feet, GRUNTS, and doubles over in pain. His gaze goes to his left side, where the broken half of Johnny's switchblade is embedded in his anatomy. Touching this swollen wound, he flinches.

WOODBURN
Balls.

Teeth gritted, the strongman digs into his side and extracts the broken blade. Blood flows anew from this injury.

The discarded knife lands in the grass. Clapping a hand to his side, Woodburn scans the vicinity, which is uninhabited. Slow and unsteady strides carry him from this lane toward a clearing, where he proceeds to the left.

The strongman passes the lions, who are agitatedly pacing around in their cages. Something BOOMS in the distance.

Woodburn reaches the food tent, strides to the far side, and looks across the clearing. His eyes widen, and his stomach knots with what he sees. Black smoke rises from the smashed side window of the aquamarine trailer.

The strongman races full speed toward the mobile home. Blood runs from his stabbed abdomen and thrice broken nose, and pains throb everywhere, but he does not slow his pace.

WOODBURN (CONT'D)
Wendy!

Woodburn runs up the steps of the mobile home and flings open the door.

INT. AQUAMARINE TRAILER - SAME

The strongman plunges into the thick black smoke that fills the aquamarine trailer. COUGHING, he looks around the place, but cannot see anything.

WOODBURN
Wendy? Are-
(he COUGHS)
Are you in here...?

The only light source in the mobile home is the CRACKLING fire that shines to the right of Woodburn. Smoke stings his eyes, and sweat drips down his face as he CHOKES.

The strongman covers his mouth with his shirt and strides toward the flames. His right hand wipes sweat and smoke from his burning eyes.

WOODBURN (CONT'D)
Wen-

Woodburn trips on something and falls. His skull SMACKS against the floor.

The last thing that he sees before losing consciousness is Wendy, whose nude body has been charred by the fire.

Blacking out, the strongman flings his left arm around the blond dancer.

A CHITTERING engine RUMBLES to life. The mobile home shakes, and a gust of wind stirs the thickening smoke. Jarred loose, the side door SLAMS shut.

INT. TEAL PICKUP TRUCK - SAME

Looking through the goggles of a gas mask, Nephew drives the teal pickup truck to which the aquamarine trailer is hitched. His shotgun rests atop the dashboard, and a dripping mop sits in the passenger seat. The vehicle's headlights are not on, but the campgrounds and the three lion cages that lie directly ahead are visible in the moonlight.

NEPHEW
Have a lil bit o' fun...

The chinless rapist cuts the wheel, and the bumper CLANKS against one of the lion cages. Sparks fly, and bending bars CREAK. Zulu ROARS.

Dialing the steering wheel clockwise, Nephew turns the pickup truck and the aquamarine trailer away from town. Tires CRUSH a tipped over garbage can.

The conjoined vehicles roll from the campground into the open field. Moonlight shines upon the surface of the vast lake that lies ahead.

The chinless rapist puts his shotgun in his lap, CLICKS the safety on, and removes his right foot from the gas pedal. Decelerating, the pickup truck reaches a speed of fifteen miles an hour.

Nephew grabs the mop from the passenger's seat, SLAPS the wet end upon the gas pedal, and twists the strings tight. His left hand cracks the driver's door, beyond which moves a carpet of tall damp grass.

Taking a breath, the chinless rapist jams the mop against the accelerator and wedges the handle against the headrest. Engine ROARING, the vehicle speeds up.

EXT. OPEN FIELD NEAR PINEBRANCH LAKE - SAME

Nephew leaps from the ROARING pickup truck that pulls the burning aquamarine trailer toward the lake. At present, he THUDS upon the grass, rolls twice, and finds his footing.

The conjoined vehicles accelerate to a speed of forty miles an hour. Pickup truck tires THUD upon a hillock.

INT. AQUAMARINE TRAILER - SAME

Trailer tires THUD upon that same hillock, and the interior of the mobile home RUMBLES. Jarred loose, the television that Nickel shot earlier falls from its stand and SLAMS upon Woodburn's unconscious head.

EXT. OPEN FIELD NEAR PINEBRANCH LAKE - SAME

A human ROAR sounds within the aquamarine trailer as it is pulled by the speeding pickup truck across grass, dirt, and rocks. Suddenly airborne, the conjoined pair fly at the lake.

BOOMING, the truck and mobile home impact the surface. Water SPLASHES in all directions, and the vehicles start to sink.

INT. DINING ROOM / JORGENSON'S HOUSE - SAME

Lorraine carries a platter of Salisbury steak into the wood-panelled dining room. Sitting at the table with an open newspaper and wearing clean clothing is Sheriff Jorgenson, whose knuckles are swollen bright red from the beating the he earlier gave the strongman.

LORRAINE
You were reading that same article twenty minutes ago.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
I haven't read anything.
(he shakes his head)
Just been staring at words.

The petite blonde places the food upon a wooden coaster as the tall lawman sets the paper down.

SHERIFF JORGENSON (CONT'D)
Need me to grab something from the kitchen?

LORRAINE
I've got it.
(she gestures at the hall)
Get Heather.

Grimacing, Sheriff Jorgenson unfolds his six foot five inch frame from his chair and strides toward the hallway. A lot of ugly thoughts swirl in his head as he reaches the nearest door and KNOCKS.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Dinner's ready.

HEATHER (O.S.)
I'm not hungry.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Your mom cooked, and you're joining us.

The tall lawman returns to the dining area as the petite blonde sets a plate of steaming mashed potatoes beside a bowl of string beans.

SHERIFF JORGENSON (CONT'D)
I'll dish.

Sheriff Jorgenson pulls out a chair for Lorraine, who then plants her rump on the proffered cushion. Gently, he slides the seat forward.

SHERIFF JORGENSON (CONT'D)
Smells terrific.

LORRAINE
Thanks.

Dressed in jeans and a baggy shirt, Heather enters the room and warily eyes Sheriff Jorgenson.

LORRAINE (CONT'D)
It's not a showdown. Sit.

The freckled brunette and the tall lawman sit down at the table. An uncomfortable silence fills the room.

Serving forks CLINK and CLANK as Sheriff Jorgenson sets Salisbury steak, mashed potatoes, and beans on a plate that he then gives Lorraine. His free hand claims another dish.

HEATHER
I'm not hungry.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Your mom made us a good dinner. Be considerate.

The freckled brunette simmers at this rebuke while the tall lawman dishes out her meal. Eventually, she loses her ability to keep quiet.

HEATHER
You're scared Johnny off last year, and every other guy in town's afraid to talk to me 'cause my dad's the Sheriff.

Sheriff Jorgenson clenches his jaw, stops serving, and looks at Heather. Lorraine grows tense.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Don't attempt to justify what you did.

HEATHER
I'm just explaining.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
You're justifying. And Johnny was garbage.

HEATHER
He always acted polite around you.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Right. He acted.

The tall lawman adds string beans to the plate, which he then gives to his daughter.

HEATHER
You don't trust me at all. You think I'm still-

LORRAINE
Heather. Stop challenging your father. He's not put a hand on you or yelled when most fathers would've done all that and more. Mine would've skinned me alive if I did what you did.

HEATHER
It's different now from when you were young.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Right. Jails are fuller and most towns and cities have twice as many law enforcers.
Does that tell you anything?

No response comes from Heather as Sheriff Jorgenson dishes himself a portion of Salisbury steak, places a napkin in his lap, and picks up his fork. The telephone RINGS, and the tall lawman frowns.

LORRAINE
I'll get it.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Let me.

Sheriff Jorgenson rises from his seat and walks into the kitchen, where he claims the receiver from the wall.

SHERIFF JORGENSON (CONT'D)
I just picked up my dinner fork.

The tall lawman listens to the caller for a few seconds, and his face hardens.

SHERIFF JORGENSON (CONT'D)
I'll call Bessier and Taylor while you're on your way here.
Bring the riot guns.

INT. AQUAMARINE TRAILER - SAME

Fire CRACKLES as ROARING water floods into the aquamarine trailer through the broken window. CREAKING, the mobile home rolls onto its side. Charred corpses tumble from the floor toward the wall, and Woodburn THUDS onto his back.

GRUNTING, the burnt and battered strongman clambers to his feet. ROARING water extinguishes the fires, and darkness fills the trailer, which is slowly sinking.

Metals CREAK as the mobile home rolls. Woodburn SLAMS against a wall, and somebody's skull SMACKS into his stomach. Things THUD and SPLASH in the dark.

A BUZZING light bulb flickers to life. Looking down, the strongman sees that the bottom of the trailer is actually the wall that contains the window (which is a ROARING geyser) and the only door (which is closed). A yard of churning water covers these potential exits and rapidly deepens.

Woodburn dives under the surface, grips the edges of the window with his fingers, and pulls himself against the inrushing fountain. The geyser POUNDS, POUNDS, POUNDS his thrice-broken nose, burnt left arm, and cut abdomen as he draws himself into the opening.

EXT. UNDERWATER / PINEBRANCH LAKE - SAME

Emerging from the underside of the sinking trailer, the strongman looks down and sees the rapidly rising bottom of the lake. Muscles knot as he strokes and kicks with all of his strength to swim clear of the collision.

The trailer BOOMS against the lakebed. Bubbles burst from Woodburn's mouth as he SHOUTS underwater. His right foot is caught between the sunken mobile home and the muddy floor of the lake.

Disturbed filth clouds the water as the strongman scoops scum from either side of his trapped leg and pulls the limb free. Lungs burning, he swims through darkness and weeds. Bubbles appear in front of him, but for some reason travel right to left rather than upwards.

Suffocating, the strongman fights the burning pain that burgeons within his lungs. His body convulses in an attempt to force filthy water into his system. Again, bubbles travel right to left in front of his eyes.

An idea occurs to Woodburn, who then turns his head to follow the spheres of oxygen. To his left lies the glimmering surface of the lake--he has been swimming across rather than up. Properly oriented, the strongman starts to rise.

His arms work furiously while his system forces filth into his lungs. Up above, fiery red and yellow lights ripple on the surface.

EXT. SHORE OF PINEBRANCH LAKE - SAME

Water SPLASHES. Woodburn breaches the lake, disgorges a quart of filthy water, GAGS, VOMITS scum, and SUCKS oxygen into his lungs. His eyes open, and he sees the ROARING blazes that consume the big top, the sideshow, and the midway booths. Motorhomes, hitched trailers, and the eighteen wheelers have left the campground or are currently rolling toward the interstate, though a few (presumably ownerless) vehicles still remain on the site. Performers and Locals alike have fled or are fleeing this awful scene.

Jaw clenched, the strongman swims toward the shore, gets his footing, and limps into the open field. The burning circus illuminates his concussed skull, smashed mouth, thrice-broken nose, stab wound, burnt left arm, and swollen right ankle.

Woodburn pauses, turns around, and looks at the lake. Bubbles rise from the sunken trailer that contains the bodies of his friends and former lover. Cold hatred shines in his eyes as he faces west and limps toward the conflagration.

EXT. CAMPGROUNDS BEHIND THE CIRCUS TENT - MOMENTS LATER

Smoke billows and fires ROAR as the strongman reaches the perimeter of the campground. Lying dead on the grass nearby is Barrel, whose rigid hands clutch his stopped heart.

Woodburn turns to his left and limps toward the metal shack. Into the shadows of his ersatz gym, he disappears. Metal CLANKS. Something SCRAPES. A CLANG and a CLANK sound. Something else SCRAPES.

From the metal shack limps the strongman. Gripped in his right fist is the forty-five pound barbell, which now holds four cinder blocks (two on either side of his hand).

Woodburn faces west and carries his collection of concrete and iron toward Pinebranch. His limping strides take him past the lion cages, two of which are occupied by dead, charred females. Zulu is missing.

EXT. COPSE THAT IS EAST OF TOWN - SAME

The distant fire throws light upon the three-acre grove of bald cypress trees that stands halfway between the campsite and town. Sweating and angry, the retired baseball player Chet carries the unconscious body of Clementine into the copse. Her blackened right eye and swollen jaw evince a physical struggle that she lost.

In a small clearing within this grove, Chet stops, sets Clementine on the ground, and RIPS open her shirt. An unconscious MOAN issues from the redheaded dancer.

Three hundred yards from the copse and silhouetted by the ROARING fire is Woodburn, whose right fist grips the cinder block barbell.

INT. PATROL CAR - SAME

A siren WAILS, and the facades of the Main Avenue buildings shine with red and blue light. Sitting in the passenger seat of the patrol car, Sheriff Jorgenson claims a riot shotgun from the rack and looks at Deputy Thatcher, who dials the steering wheel clockwise.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
When did the trouble start?

DEPUTY THATCHER
Judging by the call that came in, I'd say about twenty minutes ago.

A second WAILING and flashing patrol car arrives at an upcoming intersection on Main Avenue, and Sheriff Jorgenson nods a salutation to the two people who are seated inside--CORPORAL BESSIER, a balding, average-sized fellow of thirty five, and DEPUTY TAYLOR, a beefy, mustached older man whose weight is equal parts muscle and flab. Both of these grim-faced lawmen wave a greeting at their boss.

Deputy Thatcher drives past the second cruiser, which then turns onto Main Avenue and follows after the first. Two sirens WAIL in harmony. The stocky fellow looks at a street corner, where the homeless veteran Ralph sets down the whisky bottle that he received from Laughy and presses his shaking hands to his ears.

Sheriff Jorgenson slots thick shells into the bottom chamber of his riot shotgun.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Take Twentieth.

Deputy Thatcher corners to the right, and a yellowish-orange light fills the car. Sheriff Jorgenson looks up. Two miles to the east are the bright fires that cover the circus grounds.

SHERIFF JORGENSON (CONT'D)
Hell.

Pulling a microphone from the police radio, the tall lawman thumbs the talk bar. Static CRACKLES.

SHERIFF JORGENSON (CONT'D)
Send every apparatus in the station, and call Dalesville for support.

DISPATCHER (O.S.)
Copy.

Sheriff Jorgenson clips the microphone onto the police radio and resumes slotting shells into his riot shotgun.

EXT. COPSE OF TREE EAST OF TOWN - SAME

Pants lowered and sweating, Chet inserts himself into Clementine, who unconsciously GROANS. The ballplayer arches his back and SLAMS himself deep. YELPING, the redheaded dancer awakens and looks at the man who lies atop her. A smirk brightens his face as he pins her wrists to the ground over her head.

CHET
Awake now?

CLEMENTINE
Get off of-

The ballplayer SLAMS himself deep into the redheaded dancer, who SCREAMS.

CHET
You've got a pretty scream. Very erotic.

CLEMENTINE
Get off of-

Chet SLAMS himself deep into Clementine, who suppresses her next scream, since she know that this sound gratifies the odious man who lies atop her.

CHET
I bet you think you're too good for a man like me.

Looking away, the redheaded dancer sees something. Her eyes widen as a shadow covers the ballplayer.

CHET (CONT'D)
The fuck?

Chet turns around. A speeding cinder block SLAMS against his ribs, which SNAP. YELLING, the ballplayer tumbles off of his victim, THUDS onto his back, and rolls onto his stomach. Clementine brings her knees together.

Holding a cinder block in each hand, Woodburn walks toward Chet, who grips his smashed ribcage as he rises to his knees. Dirt covers his face, chest, and dangling phallus, and his breathing is erratic.

CHET (CONT'D)
Please...d-d-don't kill me.

Woodburn raises his arms, and the cinder blocks lift into the air. His muscles knot when the concrete units are poised directly overhead. Eyes cold with fury, the strongman whips his hands down.

Chet YELLS as the cinder blocks SLAM into either side of his head. His skull CRACKS.

Bone splinters rip through his face and scalp. From the ballplayer's smashed head comes a GURGLING SCREAM.

Police sirens WAIL in the distance. Senseless and dying, Chet collapses in the dirt.

Concrete SCRAPES against iron as Woodburn slides the stained cinder blocks back onto his barbell.

Clementine pulls up her pants, sits upright, and looks at Woodburn. Her eyes are still wide with shock.

Sirens WAIL, and hunks of red and blue light flash throughout the copse as the two police cars speed along the distant road toward the burning circus.

CLEMENTINE
Thank you for-

WOODBURN
Who killed Wendy and Nickel?

CLEMENTINE
I don't know.

Police lights and the WAILS of sirens diminish as the vehicles drive east. Woodburn faces the opposite direction, picks up the cinder block barbell, and limps toward the town of Pinebranch.

CLEMENTINE (CONT'D)
Where're you going?

The strongman takes a few lopsided strides.

WOODBURN
All the places that gave us trouble.

Shadows cover Woodburn as he proceeds through the copse with his heavy burden. Clementine thinks of something.

CLEMENTINE
There're some guns in Nickel's trailer if you want them.

Silhouetted by the town of Pinebranch, the strongman continues west.

WOODBURN
Guns are for men who don't have the muscle.

INT. GAWKY'S ROCK BAR - SAME

HARD ROCK MUSIC blasts throughout the dingy establishment. Marshall and the four Bikers drain beer mugs at the bar while Gawky fills empty ones from a tapped keg.

Three Rough Guys occupy a booth, and the Redneck Heckler plays pool in the back with an OILY DUDE.

MARSHALL
This round is on me!

The various rock bar denizens look at the tattooed leader.

ROUGH GUY
Why's that?

MARSHALL
'Cause I'm a swell guy. And if anybody ever asks--like Sheriff Jorgenson, for example--I expect all you boys to say that me and my gang left the circus the minute things got rough. That we had no part whatsoever in any of helling that transpired.

ROUGH GUY
That's fine by me.

The other two Rough Guys, the Redneck Heckler, and the Oily Dude all nod in agreement.

MARSHALL
Good. And there's one other thing: If Jorgenson or anyone else asks what we were doing here at that time, it'll be good for all of us to have the same answer.

ROUGH GUY
Let's say we were drinking...
(he thinks)
...and playing pool!

Approving denizens nod their heads at this idea while a few doubters eyeball their beers. Frowning, Marshall shakes his head 'no'.

MARSHALL
That's too ordinary to be a good alibi. It's gotta have something peculiar to sound authentic.

The educated denizens await a better suggestion. Ruminating, the tattooed leader takes a drink, sets his mug down, and looks around the bar. His eyes soon fix on an American flag.

MARSHALL (CONT'D)
Let's say we were discussing communism. Me and my gang were against it, and the rest of you thought it could work if done correctly with elections and such.

ROUGH GUY
I don't wanna be a communist.

REDNECK HECKLER
Me neither.

ROUGH GUY
How about you and your gang are the communists?

MARSHALL
Nah. Nobody'd believe that. Lemme think of something else.

The SIREN of a passing fire engine momentarily competes with the HARD ROCK MUSIC. Ruminating, the tattooed leader empties his beer and claims another from the tray that the bartender carries forth.

INT. ROD'S POOL HALL - SAME

The SIREN of the same fire engine briefly overpowers the SOUL MUSIC that plays in Rod's Pool Hall. In the back corner of this sparsely inhabited establishment, Johnny launches a cue ball across green felt at a solid red '3'. The shot sphere CLACKS into its object, which then SLAMS into a side pocket. Duane sucks on a cigarette and nods appreciatively while Tyrone nurses a forty-ounce malt liquor at a nearby table.

JOHNNY
You think maybe I should try dating a colored girl?

DUANE
I don't think that.

The eight-fingered twin blows milky smoke as the mustached fellow repositions himself for another shot.

JOHNNY
Why?

DUANE
Why would you wanna?

TYRONE
He's run out of white girls who're dumb enough.

JOHNNY
No. But sisters seem...I dunno...uninhibited. More vivacious.

DUANE
Black chicks don't dig words like those.

TYRONE
They'll think you're trying to compensate for something.

Tyrone leans back in his chair until his Afro touches the floral wallpaper. His right hand scratches the nub of his missing ear as he drinks from his forty-ounce bottle.

JOHNNY
They wouldn't think I'm cool?

TYRONE
Cool guys don't get so worked up 'bout things like you do. That's what makes them-

Tyrone sees something that precludes the end of his reply. Limping through the pool hall entrance and holding a cinder block in one hand and a barbell in the other is Woodburn, burnt, bruised, and bloody. The five Locals on the other side of the room get out of the way of this new arrival.

TYRONE (CONT'D)
Duane-

Tyrone points. Duane and Johnny turn around and see Woodburn, who is forty feet away.

The strongman throws the cinder block. Concrete SMACKS the face of the eight-fingered sibling, who then drops alongside his pool cue to the ground. Frightened Locals run out of the establishment as the attacker ambles forward.

Scared, Johnny backs away from the pool table until he is standing next to Tyrone, who is already up against the wall.

JOHNNY
Where's the fucking manager!?!

Continuing forward, Woodburn STOMPS upon Duane's unconscious face, which CRACKS, and grabs the cinder block.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)
Somebody call the po-

A cinder block POUNDS into Johnny's right leg, and his shin SNAPS. SCREAMING, the mustached fellow drops to the ground.

Tyrone fits his brass knuckles to his right fist and monitors Woodburn, who is sixteen feet away and drawing nearer. The one-eared twin grows fearful as the distance between him and the strongman diminishes to ten feet.

Terrified, Tyrone bolts to his left. Woodburn swings the barbell like a baseball bat. Iron POUNDS into the mouth of the one-eared twin. Teeth CRACK, and his jawbone SHATTERS. Gore bursts from his nostrils as he collapses.

SOBBING, Johnny drags his broken right leg and the rest of himself across the carpet. Tears and mucus run down his face.

The strongman picks up the cinder block.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, man, I shouldn't've-

Woodburn SLAMS the concrete unit against Johnny's right hand, which CRUNCHES. YELLING, the mustached fellow withdraws his arm. Three and a half severed fingers stick to the carpet.

Again, Woodburn swings the cinder block. Concrete POUNDS against Johnny's spine, which SNAPS.

The mustached fellow SHRIEKS. His legs twitch uncontrollably, and urine darkens his jeans.

Holding the barbell and cinder block, the strongman turns away from his victim and ambles toward the exit. His lopsided strides are unhurried.

SOBBING and GASPING, Johnny tries to rise from the floor, but is only able to helplessly flounder.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)
I can't move my legs.

A terrible realization comes to the mind of the mustached young man.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)
I'm fucking paralyzed!

Without saying a single word, Woodburn exits Rod's Pool Hall.

EXT. MAIN AVENUE - SAME

The strongman ambles onto the sidewalk that runs along Main Avenue. A few LOCALS see his abused condition--and crude weaponry--and veer in another direction. Smoke from the distant fire darkens the air and elicits a few COUGHS from these passersby.

At present, Woodburn crosses Main Avenue, limps past a closed-down pawn shop, and disappears into an alley. Smoke wafts through the headlights of a passing car in which an EXCITED BOY bounces in his seat and looks at his LITTLE SISTER.

EXCITED BOY
We're gonna watch them put out the fire!

EXT. ALLEYWAY THAT PARALLELS MAIN AVENUE - SAME

The strongman reclaims three cached cinder blocks from behind a dumpster and returns them and the fourth one to the barbell. Gripping this balanced burden in his right fist, he scans the alleyway, which runs parallel to Main Avenue. Moonlight and the emanations of a few distant street lamps show that nobody else inhabits this area.

Woodburn walks north. Thoughts of Wendy, Nickel, prison, his childhood in Pinebranch, and a thousand other things fuel his violent agenda. Smoke from the circus darkens the air.

Lopsided strides carry the strongman past unlighted buildings, garbage cans, dumpsters, a sleeping (or dead) white dog, two parked cars, and several chained bicycles. A dim MUSICAL THROB emanates from the next block and garners his attention.

Woodburn crosses the street and continues north. It soon becomes clear to him that this muffled sound is HARD ROCK MUSIC. Mismatched coats of paint adorn the building that produces this noise.

The strongman stops at the rear of this establishment and raises his gaze. Silhouetted in front of the night sky is the distribution transformer that supplies Gawky's Rock Bar with its power.

Woodburn sets down the cinder block barbell, looks around, and sees a very large dumpster. Lopsided strides bring him to the trash receptacle, which he then opens. The bin is full.

A new song of HARD ROCK MUSIC begins as the strongman closes the lid and secures the latch. Pressing the palms of his hands against the metal, he plants his feet and leans forward. The dumpster rolls.

Woodburn guides the ponderous trash receptacle toward the back door of the rock bar and stops pushing when only six feet remain between the two.

The strongman upends the dumpster, which flies off of its wheels and CLANKS onto its side. SLAMMING his right shoulder into the metal and employing his prodigious strength, he shoves the capsized receptacle toward the rear exit of the bar. The dumpster SCRAPES across concrete and then THUMPS against the back door. This avenue of escape from the rock bar is now sealed.

The strongman claims a cinder block from the barbell, turns around, and eyes the distribution transformer, which looms twenty-five feet overhead.

INT. GAWKY'S ROCK BAR - SAME

HARD ROCK MUSIC blasts, and Rough Guys CHATTER. At the bar with Gawky and the four Bikers is Marshall, whose eyes are currently fixed upon the American flag.

GAWKY
Marshall? Is something wrong?

MARSHALL
When was the last time you washed that flag?

GAWKY
Must've been before the war started.

MARSHALL
Is that a statement?

EXT. ALLEYWAY THAT PARALLELS MAIN AVENUE - SAME

In the alleyway, Woodburn hurls a cinder block. The speeding concrete unit SLAMS into the distribution transformer, which SHATTERS. HISSING white and blue sparks fly everywhere.

The rectilinear missile falls and CRACKS in half against the pavement. At present, the strongman picks up the barbell and carries the three intact cinder blocks toward Main Avenue.

INT. GAWKY'S ROCK BAR - SAME

The house lights and the HARD ROCK MUSIC shut off and then surge back on. Marshall, the Bikers, and many of the denizens look at Gawky.

MARSHALL
Is bad weather on its way?

GAWKY
I didn't hear-

The HARD ROCK MUSIC goes silent, and the lights shut off. Darkness spreads throughout the bar. Irritated MUTTERS come from the Redneck Heckler, the Oily Dude, and the Rough Guys.

GAWKY (CONT'D)
(loudly)
Everybody just hold on a minute. It's probably just a fluctuation with the-

Something SHATTERS outside of the bar.

BIKER
What was that?

REDNECK HECKLER
Sounded like a car windshield getting smashed.

ROUGH GUY
Let's see.

A pair of beer mugs CLACK upon a table, and two Rough Guys proceed toward the door. FOOTFALLS sound as these dim, barely distinguishable silhouettes traverse the dark interior. The foremost of the duo is a Mexican dude, and the other one is a heavily pockmarked fellow. Again, glass SHATTERS outside.

REDNECK HECKLER
Definitely a windshield.

The Mexican Rough Guy reaches the entrance, grabs the handle, and opens the door. Directly outside of the bar is a pickup truck that has shattered front and rear windshields.

MEXICAN ROUGH GUY
(calling out)
Lester. Somebody smashed your windshields.

LESTER
Catch him goddammit!

The third Rough Guy (LESTER) climbs out of his booth as his peers run out into the smoky night.

EXT. GAWKY'S ROCK BAR / MAIN AVENUE - SAME

Standing alongside the facade of the rock bar, Woodburn swings his barbell like a baseball bat at the head foremost Rough Guy. Iron SHATTERS the face of the Mexican fellow, who blacks out before his knees hit the sidewalk.

The second Rough Guy gapes in shock as the strongman swings the barbell again. Iron POUNDS the pockmarked fellow's right ear and SLAMS his head against the facade.

Woodburn swings at the pinned skull, which CRACKS wide open. SCREAMING, the second Rough Guy drops.

With fists raised, Lester comes into the doorway.

LESTER
Put down that-

Woodburn rams the barbell into Lester's mouth, angles to the left, and shoves forward. The victims's skull SLAMS into the doorframe. Broken teeth fall and RATTLE like thrown dice upon the concrete.

Woodburn jams the pole deeper, and Lester GARGLES blood. The strongman repositions his grip and whips the barbell one hundred and eighty degrees. The third rough guy flies through the air and SMACKS his face against the sidewalk.

INT. GAWKY'S ROCK BAR - SAME

Marshall, Gawky, the Bikers, the Redneck Heckler, and the Oily Dude watch the open doorway, though Woodburn is not currently visible from this vantage. Two of the riders look at their tattooed leader.

BIKER
Me and Jed'll stick this faggot.

MARSHALL
Have fun.

Switchblades CLICK as the two Bikers walk toward the doorway. Woodburn appears with a raised cinder block.

Thrown concrete SMACKS the face of the first rider, who then flies back and SLAMS his head against a table.

MARSHALL (CONT'D)
Jed. Outta that way!

The second Biker scampers clear as Gawky withdraws a shotgun.

Woodburn storms inside with his barbell and SLAMS the door. Darkness fills Gawky's Rock Bar. Unable to see, the bartender holds his fire.

FOOTFALLS sound as the strongman rushes to his right. A barbell SLAMS into the neck of the second Biker, whose vertebrae SNAP. YELLING, this fellow THUDS on the ground.

REDNECK HECKLER
Shoot him!

GAWKY
Can't see!

Marshall snatches the shotgun from Gawky as the third and fourth Bikers rush forward. Woodburn hurls a table, which SMACKS the face of the foremost rider and knocks him out.

GAWKY (CONT'D)
Jesus.

Marshall cannot get a clear shot past the fourth Biker, who currently runs at Woodburn with an upraised barstool.

MARSHALL
Get clear!

The strongman swings his barbell at the onrushing rider. Iron SLAMS into the latter man's arms and SNAPS two ulnas. Dropped, the barstool CLATTERS on the ground.

Pained and ROARING with anger, this fourth Biker drives forward and SLAMS into Woodburn, who drops the barbell. The forty-five pound iron pole CLANKS on the floor.

The strongman wraps his arms around the midsection of his foe, grabs his own right wrist with his left hand, and squeezes. Ribs SNAP under the pressure of this lethal bear hug. Splintered bones pierce the rider's lungs, and a torrent of blood bursts from his SHRIEKING mouth.

GAWKY
Holy Jesus.

Shotgun raised, Marshall stalks sideways to get a clear shot at Woodburn, who is still hidden behind the dying Biker.

GAWKY (CONT'D)
Shoot 'im!

The strongman repositions his hands and hurls his victim. Gunpowder BOOMS. Buckshot peppers the thrown rider a second before he SLAMS into the tattooed leader.

Woodburn runs forward. Marshall shoves aside the dead Biker and raises his shotgun. The strongman SLAMS into the tattooed leader, grabs the firearm, and bends the weapon in half.

MARSHALL
So this's how you treat a friend of the family?

Marshall throws a jab at Woodburn, who SLAPS the punch away, SLAMS an elbow into his opponent's neck, and knees him in the stomach. The tattooed leader GASPS and doubles over.

Leaning on the counter, Gawky SLASHES Woodburn's right shoulder with a kitchen knife. The strongman seizes the bartender by the throat, digs his fingers into his neck, and RIPS out his esophagus.

The kitchen knife CLANKS upon the bar. Wide eyed and in shock, Gawky pointlessly tries to stuff the pinkish-white tube back into his neck.

WHEEZING from the brutal blows, Marshall rises. Two hard fists SLAM into his stomach, and again, he doubles over.

The Redneck Heckler and the Oily Dude quietly sneak toward the back door in an effort to escape.

Woodburn reaches out claims the kitchen knife from the bar.

WHEEZING, Marshall looks up.

MARSHALL (CONT'D)
I said-
(he GASPS)
-your mama was good-
(he WHEEZES)
-didn't I?

The tattooed leader lunges at the strongman, who SLAMS a left hook into his face. Staggered, the biker stumbles backward and THUMPS onto his buttocks. His eyes show that he is dazed.

Leaning over, Woodburn raises Marshall's shirt, presses the knifepoint into his stomach, and SLASHES diagonally to the right and to the left.

The tattooed leader lowers his blurry gaze and sees the red 'X' that now covers his entire belly. At present, blood drips from these crossed, foot-long lacerations.

Marshall looks up at Woodburn, whose gaze is cold and remote.

MARSHALL (CONT'D)
You're a fucking nutcase.

The tattooed leader's innards push against the triangular flaps of skin, which open like a flower petals. Futilely, the biker tries to hold back the tide of blood and entrails.

Woodburn turns away from Marshall, discards the knife, and grabs a cinder block.

In the farthest corner of the bar, the Redneck Heckler and the Oily Dude press their shoulders against the back door, which is held firmly in place by the dumpster. The cinder block SLAMS into the upper back of the latter fellow, whose face then SMACKS against the wood. Unconscious, he falls to the ground.

The frightened last survivor turns around and faces the approaching strongman.

REDNECK HECKLER
Hey...look...I was only joking be-

Woodburn grabs the Redneck Heckler by the throat with both of his hands. Tears fill the terrified eyes of the small and flabby middle-aged fellow.

REDNECK HECKLER (CONT'D)
Please don't. I have a wife and two-

Bones CRACK as the strongman breaks the fellow's neck. Sixty feet away, Marshall tips forward and falls into a pile of his own guts.

INT. CIRCUS MIDWAY - SAME

FIREMEN aim SPRAYING hoses at the contained blazes that only moments ago ravaged the big top, the booths, and The Exhibition of Bizarre Horrors. Standing in the middle of the smoky midway are Sheriff Jorgenson and Deputy Thatcher, both of whom have acquired soot, cuts, and burns since their arrival. The tall lawman looks into the rear of an ambulance, where lies Clementine, who is staring up at the ceiling in shock, and Dirty Rita, whose lungs are being fed oxygen through a mask.

Grimly, Sheriff Jorgenson nods at a PARAMEDIC and shuts the door. Lights spin atop the ambulance, and its siren WAILS as it rolls from the midway.

The tall lawman turns his sour gaze to four tarpaulin-covered lumps that are human bodies, shakes his head, and then notices something on the ground nearby. A few strides bring him closer to this object, which is a broken pickle jar. Lying within the shattered glass is Cerella, the pinkish-gray girl fetus that has only one eye.

DEPUTY THATCHER
Sheriff. There-

Deputy Thatcher points north, and Sheriff Jorgenson looks in that direction. Beyond the outermost edge of the firelight, a small, anomalous shape crawls through the moonlit grass. The tall lawman and his stocky subordinate proceed together toward this unknown being.

DEPUTY THATCHER (CONT'D)
Is that a dog?

SHERIFF JORGENSON
I can't tell.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
I'm not a fucking dog.

Dragging himself into the firelight is Harry the Human Crab. Blood colors his face, and a bruise that is the size of a plumb sits on his forehead.

DEPUTY THATCHER
Sir. Do you need medical attention?

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB
What're my other options?

Sheriff Jorgenson and Deputy Thatcher reach Harry the Human Crab. For a moment, the tall lawman tries to appraise the condition of this highly anomalous victim.

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB (CONT'D)
Most of what you see is how I usually am. Where's Nickel?

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Missing.

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB
Then he isn't breathing.
(he shakes his head)
You stupid goddamn sister-lovers.

Offended, Deputy Thatcher steps forward.

DEPUTY THATCHER
Don't talk to-

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB
Nickel asked you guys to send some uniforms to the show.
(he eyes the sheriff)
Were you too pissed off to help because the strongman screwed your daughter?

Sheriff Jorgenson shoves down his anger in an attempt to redirect the conversation.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Our town is our responsibility, not a show in a field two miles off.

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB
I doubt the locals who died here would agree with you.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
I don't want to argue.
We need to apprehend the people who did this, but everybody who isn't dead or in the hospital ran off.
Will you help us?

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB
I could care less what you rednecks do to each other, and I don't give a shit about 'justice' or 'revenge'.
I want my goddamn job and my goddamn friends and the only honest boss that I ever-

Harry the Human Crab loses his voice, makes two fists, and turns his glimmering eyes to the ground.

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB (CONT'D)
This whole conversation's pointless.

Embittered, the anomalous performer rises on his arms, turns away from the policemen, and walks on his hands toward an overturned motorhome.

DEPUTY THATCHER
Sir. We'll need an official statement before-

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB
My official statement is 'Go fuck your sister'.

A walkie-talkie CRACKLES. Sheriff Jorgenson raises the two-way radio to his mouth and thumbs the talk bar.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Jorgenson.

DISPATCHER (O.S.)
Two attacks have been reported on Main. The first at Rod's Pool Hall, the second at Gawky's. Both sound ugly.

DEPUTY THATCHER
Lord.

The tall lawman thumbs the talk bar.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
I'll leave Taylor and Bessier here and head over with Thatcher right now. Send an ambulance.

INT. BACK OFFICE / RIGHT HOOK RONNIE'S LIQUOR - SAME

Nephew looks into the mirror that hangs upon a wall of the back office while applying ointment to the four gashes that Wendy scratched across his face. Sitting in a nearby chair, a bespectacled DOCTOR of sixty-eight digs into the shot shoulder of Right Hook Ronnie with a pair of forceps.

DOCTOR
There's the little devil.

The bullet is withdrawn by the senior practitioner and dropped into a shot glass, where it CLINKS.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
Thanks, Doc.

DOCTOR
I thought you boys just intended to throw fists and elbows into that funnyman.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
He drew a gun, and things escalated.

NEPHEW
Quick.

Somebody KNOCKS. Nephew and Right Hook Ronnie grab guns and point two muzzles at the door.

FREDDIE (O.S.)
It's me.

Relaxing, the retired boxer and the chinless rapist lower their weapons. The latter fellow presses a square of gauze to his facial wounds and approaches the door.

NEPHEW
Comin'.

Nephew undoes two deadbolts, turns the handle, and pulls the door wide. Dirty and perspiring, Freddie strides from the dark liquor store into the office.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
Cousin Dan's been buried?

FREDDIE
Yeah.

The retired boxer notices something and frowns as the muscular protege shuts the door.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
You're tracking dirt into the armory.

Freddie looks down and sees a few bits of dirt on the ground.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE (CONT'D)
Go outside and stamp your boots.

INT. RIGHT HOOK RONNIE'S LIQUOR - SAME

Annoyed, the muscular protege returns to the dark liquor store, closes the back door, and walks over to the front entrance. His right hand undoes the bolt and turns the knob.

The door SMACKS into his face, and he stumbles backward.

Woodburn storms into the shop and SLAMS a left hook into Freddie's face. His jaw SNAPS, and he staggers back.

FREDDIE
Ronnie! There's-

Woodburn swings the barbell at Freddie, who is withdrawing his semiautomatic from his side holster.

Iron CRACKS the muscular protege's skull. Knocked from his feet, he SLAMS into a shelf and knocks it over. Whisky bottles SHATTER.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE (O.S.)
Freddie?

Gripping the barbell, the strongman runs as fast as his swollen ankle will allow toward the office, which is more than fifty feet away. His lopsided strides POUND the ground, and his injuries burn. The far door starts to open.

GRUNTING, Woodburn hurls the barbell like a javelin.

INT. BACK OFFICE / RIGHT HOOK RONNIE'S LIQUOR - SAME

The iron pole POUNDS the door, which then SMACKS Nephew in the face. Dazed, the chinless rapist stumbles back and tries to regain his footing.

Woodburn rushes into the office as Nephew raises his shotgun. The strongman SLAMS into the chinless rapist. Gunpowder BOOMS. Wild buckshot peppers the ceiling and SHATTERS one of the two fluorescent lights.

The Doctor scampers from the office as Woodburn grabs Nephew's neck, SLAMS his skull into the wall, and throws his body at Right Hook Ronnie. Sidestepping, the retired boxer clears out of the path of his underling, whose head then CLANGS against the metal desk.

Woodburn lunges forward, SLAMS into Right Hook Ronnie, and knocks him onto his back. Pinned to the ground by the strongman, the retired boxer raises his semiautomatic.

Woodburn POUNDS Right Hook Ronnie's shot shoulder. The retired boxer YELLS and drops the gun, which CLATTERS on the linoleum. Another fist POUNDS his face, and his nose SNAPS.

The famous right hook POUNDS Woodburn's left ear and knocks his head askew. Ear RINGING from the blow, the strongman grabs the semiautomatic.

RIGHT HOOK RONNIE
You need to shoot me to win, faggot?

WOODBURN
Nope.

Metal SCRAPES against human enamel as Woodburn jams the barrel of the semiautomatic into Right Hook Ronnie's mouth. The retired boxer GAGS.

ROARING, Woodburn raises a fist and POUNDS the butt of the gun. Right Hook Ronnie's teeth CRACK, and the muzzle fills his throat. A left hook SLAMS into the strongman's side and CRACKS ribs.

Again, Woodburn POUNDS the butt of the gun. Right Hook Ronnie's jawbone SNAPS as the muzzle BURSTS through the back of his head and CLICKS against the linoleum. Shocked, the retired boxer posthumously stares up at the strongman.

Woodburn rises to his feet, rubs his broken ribs, and looks at Nephew, who is still breathing, though unconscious. A few uneven strides carry the former to the latter. At present, the strongman looks at the bandage on the chinless rapist's face, which has four separate red streaks.

Woodburn leans over and SNIFFS Nephew's hands. A boiling fury fills the strongman.

Standing upright, Woodburn scans the back office. His gaze soon fixes upon the metal cabinet. Dangling from a peg within are two pairs of stainless steel handcuffs.

EXT. ROD'S POOL HALL / MAIN AVENUE - SAME

A MALE and a FEMALE PARAMEDIC roll a gurney that holds the unconscious body of Johnny out of Rod's Pool Hall toward an ambulance. Spinning red and blue lights shine, and a siren WAILS as a police car pulls onto the nearby sidewalk and SCREECHES to a halt. From this cruiser emerge Sheriff Jorgenson and Deputy Thatcher.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Sharon. Can I-

The woman in white shakes her head as she rolls the gurney toward the curb.

FEMALE PARAMEDIC
He's sedated. And the one in the pool hall isn't answering any questions ever.

Sheriff Jorgenson and Deputy Thatcher frown as the two Paramedics load the gurney that has Johnny into the ambulance. Lying inside of this vehicle upon the right bench and wearing a neck brace is Duane, whose face is covered with bandages. The tall lawman points at this other victim.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
He's unconscious?

FEMALE VOICE
With brain damage.

The woman sits on the left bench while her partner shuts the door and takes the front seat.

Sheriff Jorgenson looks toward the building entrance, where stand two locals who were around earlier that night--a BLACK POOL PLAYER who smokes a cigar and his immodestly dressed GIRLFRIEND, who is fixing her makeup. The policemen approach this couple.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Were you here when this happened?

BLACK POOL PLAYER
We left right when the guy came in.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
It was just one person?

BLACK POOL PLAYER
Yep.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
What'd he look like?

BLACK POOL PLAYER
Big guy with a busted up face and a burnt up left arm.
(he sucks on his cigarette)
Muscles everywhere.

Stunned, Sheriff Jorgenson stares at the Black Pool Player.

DEPUTY THATCHER
Did the guy say anything?

The witness exhales smoke.

BLACK POOL PLAYER
No. Just walked in and went at the others. Had himself a barbell and a cinder block.

DEPUTY THATCHER
Lord.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Thanks for the info.

Sheriff Jorgenson and Deputy Thatcher walk away, look into the pool hall, and see the inert body of Tyrone, whose crushed head is barely recognizable as that of a human being.

DEPUTY THATCHER
It's like an elephant stepped on him.

The policemen turn around and stride toward the cruiser.

DEPUTY THATCHER (CONT'D)
We're making an APB?

SHERIFF JORGENSON
After I call home.

Deputy Thatcher eyes Sheriff Jorgenson, who passes the patrol car, reaches a public phone, and slots a dime.

DEPUTY THATCHER
You think he might come after Heather?

SHERIFF JORGENSON
I can't see why he would, but I'm not taking any risks.
(he dials his number)
I'll have Lorraine take her to my brother's.

INT. BACK OFFICE / RIGHT HOOK RONNIE'S LIQUOR - SAME

Glass SHATTERS, awakening Nephew, who lies nude upon his side atop the wet floor of the back office. Handcuffs secure his wrists behind his back, and a second pair fetter his ankles. The chinless rapist squints, scans the space, and fixes his gaze upon the dead body of Right Hook Ronnie, who has a gun jammed deep into his smashed mouth.

Glass SHATTERS. Startled, Nephew turns his head to look at the closed door. Approaching footfalls SPLASH on the far side in the liquor store. Fear fills the nude captive.

The door opens and from the darkness limps Woodburn, whose injured ankle and smashed face are purplish-black and grossly swollen. Blood trickles from the cracked skin that covers his burnt left arm.

NEPHEW
What're you-

WOODBURN
How'd you get those scratches on your face?

Nephew stares mutely at Woodburn while trying to think of a believable answer.

WOODBURN (CONT'D)
And why do you smell like perfume?

No answer to this question comes from the chinless rapist, who is starting to shake with fear. The strongman walks forward, leans over, and picks up the nude captive.

NEPHEW
Don't h-

Woodburn slings Nephew over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes and walks toward the door. Footfalls SPLASH.

INT. RIGHT HOOK RONNIE'S LIQUOR - SAME

The strongman carries the chinless rapist into the dark store and SMACKS the man's skull against a light switch. Fluorescent bulbs BUZZ.

Nephew twists his head around to see into the shop. Flickering lights shine upon the nine-inch deep pile of broken bottles that now fills the center aisle.

Urine runs down the chinless rapist's leg.

NEPHEW
Please God d-

Woodburn throws Nephew. Terrified, the bound and nude captive flies headfirst at the array of broken bottles. Glass CRUNCHES, and shards pierce his face, body, and groin.

SHRIEKING, Nephew flops twice and rolls onto his back. Glass shards jut from his punctured eyeballs and shredded genitals and a hundred other places.

NEPHEW (CONT'D)
P-p-please st-

Woodburn grabs Nephew's fettered ankles, jerks him into the air, and whips him back down. Broken bottles CRUNCH. The chinless rapist SHRIEKS until his vocal chords rupture.

EXT. RIGHT HOOK RONNIE'S LIQUOR / MAIN AVENUE - SAME

Woodburn lumbers out of the liquor store. Smoke from the distant fire hangs in the air as he scans the environment. Standing on the far corner is Zulu, the male lion. The left side of the beast's face has been charred to the bone, and blood colors his snout. A dead person is prostrated on the pavement near this lion in a pool of gore.

Woodburn claims the remaining cinder block from the side of store and monitors Zulu, who is staring back at him and GROWLING. A car passes between the two- and four-legged beasts, but their unblinking gazes do not waver.

The strongman takes a step forward, and the lion SNORTS.

Turning away, Zulu stalks off in a different direction.

Woodburn carries the cinder block to the edge of the sidewalk and looks north. The traffic light at the next intersection is currently red, and below this signal sits a brown pickup truck. A handsome YOUNG STUD who wears a cowboy hat and chews tobacco sits at the wheel of this vehicle.

The light changes from red to green. RUMBLING, the pickup truck rolls south.

The strongman steps into the road and hurls the cinder block. Flying concrete speeds at the windshield and SHATTERS the passenger's side. The Young Stud STOMPS the brakes. Tires SCREECH, and the pickup truck stops.

Into the glaring headlights lumbers the battered, burnt, and swollen entity of fury that is Woodburn. The driver's door opens, and the Young Stud steps outside.

YOUNG STUD
What the hell you th-

The strongman POUNDS the driver in the face, grabs him by the arm with both hands, and whips him into the air. SHOUTING, the innocent local CLANKS his skull against a telephone pole, falls back, and THUDS upon the sidewalk.

Into the IDLING vehicle and behind the spiderwebbed windshield climbs Woodburn. A good hand shifts gears, and a charred one seizes the wheel. ROARING, the pickup truck speeds forward.

EXT. GAWKY'S ROCK BAR / MAIN AVENUE - SAME

Approaching the open doorway of Gawky's Rock Bar with raised revolvers, Sheriff Jorgenson and Deputy Thatcher circumvent the bloody bodies of the pockmarked and Mexican Rough Guys. The stocky subordinate furtively glances at the victims.

DEPUTY THATCHER
One's breathing.
(to the Mexican)
Sir. An ambulance is on it's way.

No response comes from the insensate fellow. Eyes forward, the tall lawman shines his flashlight through the doorway and illuminates a crushed face.

DEPUTY THATCHER (CONT'D)
(muttered)
Lord.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
(calling out)
This is the Pinebranch police. Is anybody alive in there?

WEAK MALE VOICE (O.S.)
Yes.

INT. GAWKY'S ROCK BAR - SAME

Gun in one hand and flashlight in the other, Sheriff Jorgenson leads Deputy Thatcher into Gawky's Rock Bar. The bright beam pans over the crushed heads of dead Bikers and then illuminates Marshall, who lies facedown in a pile of his own innards. Both policemen are unnerved by this sight.

DEPUTY THATCHER
Now what's the reason for doing something like that to a person?

SHERIFF JORGENSON
I think this strongman's past the point of saying things we're gonna understand.

Deeply uneasy, the tall lawman sweeps his flashlight around the wrecked establishment.

SHERIFF JORGENSON (CONT'D)
(calling out)
Sir? Where're you located?

WEAK MALE VOICE (O.S.)
Back here.

Sheriff Jorgenson aims his flashlight toward the back door, against which slumps the Oily Dude, whose battered face is swollen and bloody. His hemorrhaged right eye is dark purple.

DEPUTY THATCHER
(quietly)
Is that Sid Barland?

SHERIFF JORGENSON
(quietly)
I think so.
(calling out)
Mr. Barland, we're coming towards you now.

Watching the shadows, the policemen walk over to the victim.

SHERIFF JORGENSON (CONT'D)
Can you tell us what happened?

OILY DUDE
Elias's boy did this--killed all these people. Almost killed me too.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Elias Woodburn?
(he thinks for a moment)
Didn't his son drown a long time ago?

OILY DUDE
There was an older one who left.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
It wasn't the circus strongman that did all this?

OILY DUDE
That's him. That's Elias's son--the circus strongman.

Sheriff Jorgenson processes this new information.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Any idea why he came here?

OILY DUDE
Marshall and his boys were ribbing him at the circus.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Okay. An ambulance is on it's way.

The tall lawman eyes the stocky fellow, and together, they stride toward the door.

SHERIFF JORGENSON (CONT'D)
Let's see if we can reach Elias by phone. If not, we're driving over.

DEPUTY THATCHER
You think the Woodburns are gonna have a reunion?

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Maybe. Though it won't be the kind where people do a lot of talking.

INT. BROWN PICKUP TRUCK - SAME

Two cold eyes look through spiderwebbed glass at the dirt road, which is bordered on either side by swamplands. Unpleasant memories and hot air accompany the strongman as he drives west through an area that he has not seen in more than two decades.

Sweat drips down his brow. Tires RUMBLE as the brown pickup truck rolls across bumpy surfaces. High beams pan across the twisted trees that line the road.

More sweat drips into Woodburn's eyes. His right hand wipes the moisture away and then ratchets the air conditioner dial to the 'Hi' setting. The broken unit does not respond.

Headlights shine upon a pale rise that lies up ahead. Perspiration rolls down the strongman's forehead and stings his eyes, which he then wipes clear. It soon becomes clear to him that the upcoming anomaly is a bridge.

Woodburn slows the vehicle. Tires THUD upon uneven planks, and the shifting bridge GROANS as the brown pickup truck arcs over a river that is more mud than water. At present, the vehicle returns to the dirt road, which bends southwest.

The strongman surveys the gnarled swamplands in order to better orient himself. Perspiration drips into his eyes, and a mosquito BUZZES in front his face.

Woodburn throw his burnt left fist at the spiderwebbed windshield. Safety glass SHATTERS. At present, the strongman retracts his hand, grips an edge of the hole, and RIPS loose a large CRUNCHING swath. Crystalline chips RATTLE on the dashboard as he reclaims the steering wheel.

Inrushing air cools Woodburn, who currently monitors the road. A dark and unnamed route soon appears on the left.

The strongman applies the brakes. Blood drips and glass chips fall as he dials the steering wheel counterclockwise.

The brown pickup truck turns to the left. Headlights pan across twisted trees and fling serpentine shadows.

Jaw clenched, Woodburn drives along a narrow and declining road. Putrescent marsh air blows upon his abused face while mosquitos BUZZ beside his ears. His fists are tight upon the wheel, and his eyes scan the dense grove that stands to the right. A small dark opening soon appears in this swampland.

Dialing the wheel clockwise, the strongman turns the truck to the right. Tires THUD and RUMBLE upon the warped wooden planks that stabilize this muddy road.

Mosquitoes BUZZ as Woodburn drives deeper into the dense swampland. A square glimmers in the trees to his left. Headlights shine brighter and brighter upon this object, which is a rusty, dented mailbox that has the name ‘WOODBURN’ scratched into its side.

The strongman presses the gas pedal. Tires THUMP, RUMBLE, and THUD upon warped planks as the truck gathers speed. Glass chips fall from the flapping remains of the windshield.

Woodburn steers around a bend. Tires THUMP, RUMBLE, and THUD across the planks. Headlights shine down the driveway and illuminate an old green house, which has a collapsed porch, a patched roof, and encroaching overgrowth that looks like the inside of a diseased lung.

Adjusting the steering wheel, the strongman aims the truck directly at the front door of his childhood home. His right foot STOMPS the accelerator. ROARING, the vehicle speeds west. Tires CRUNCH, CRACK, and SNAP wooden planks.

One hundred feet lie between the green house and the speeding truck. Woodburn scans the windows to his right, which are all dark, and then looks to his left. A room on that side glows with the throbbing blue light of a television.

Ten feet lie between the ROARING vehicle and the home.

The vehicle leaps onto the porch and POUNDS the facade; Woodburn SLAMS against the steering wheel. The front wall EXPLODES in a cloud of splinters. ROARING, the vehicle BURSTS into the living room, CRUSHES a couch, POUNDS a recliner chair, SMASHES a table, and THUDS into the far wall, which BUCKLES. HISSING, the truck stops moving.

INT. LIVING ROOM / THE WOODBURN HOUSE - SAME

The ceiling CREAKS and tilts to the west. Glowing red taillights turn the smoke, dust, and falling debris that fill the living room into an infernal tableau. At present, the driver's door of the wrecked pickup truck opens.

Woodburn lumbers from the vehicle, eyes the familiar room, and SPITS. Broken teeth RATTLE against an overturned table as gore drips from his forehead, nose, and chin.

Turning his head, the strongman looks down the main hallway. Pulsating blue light and BIG BAND MUSIC emerge from the partly open room that lies at the far end of this passage on the left.

Lumbering through the red atmosphere, Woodburn arrives at the hallway entrance. A crooked picture on the wall shows a mother, a father, and two boys (a twelve year old and a toddler), all of whom are sitting around a birthday cake. The patriarch in this photo very much resembles the strongman.

Woodburn SMASHES the image with his burnt fist.

SLURRED MALE VOICE (O.S.)
I've got a gun.

The strongman walks to a shelf and claims a phone book. BIG BAND MUSIC plays, and people APPLAUD as labored strides carry him down the hallway toward the throbbing blue room. Eighty feet lie between him and his destination.

SLURRED MALE VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I'll shoot, I promise.

Woodburn faces a circuit breaker panel, opens the flap, and CLICKS a switch. The luminous blue bedroom at the end of the hallway goes dark. At present, the strongman presses his back to the left side of the passage.

SLURRED MALE VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Stay clear!

Two GUNSHOTS flash within the dark bedroom. Bullets SMACK into the right side of the equally dark hallway.

SLURRED MALE VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Get out of here!

Two more GUNSHOTS flash in the bedroom and CRACK into the right hallway wall at head level. Crawling along the safe side of the passage, Woodburn proceeds toward the dark doorway on the left.

SLURRED MALE VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I don't keep any money here.

Nearing the bedroom, the crawling strongman shields his head with the phone book. The entrance is less than two feet away.

INT. BEDROOM / THE WOODBURN HOUSE - SAME

Sitting in the darkness beside the bed, ELIAS WOODBURN points his gun at the equally dark doorway.

ELIAS
I told you, I don't keep-

A thrown phone book SMACKS his hand, and the revolver CLATTERS upon the wood floor. Woodburn storms across the dark toward Elias.

ELIAS (CONT'D)
Don't!

The strongman claims the revolver from the ground, opens the bathroom door, and tosses the weapon into the toilet. His burnt hand flicks a switch, which CLICKS.

The overhead bathroom light shines upon Elias Woodburn, a gaunt and shrunken sixty-eight year old in a wheelchair and ratty robe whose legs are knobby twigs and whose drooping face shows the affects of a stroke. Irritation narrows his eyes as he looks at the burnt, battered, and hugely muscular intruder who stands in his bedroom.

ELIAS (CONT'D)
I told you I don't keep any money here. Search around if you don't believe me.

Woodburn stares mutely at Elias, who reaches out and claims a bowl of colorful cereal from the nightstand.

ELIAS (CONT'D)
Don't want this to get soggy.

WOODBURN
Do I look familiar to you?

The disabled father spoons a rainbow into his mouth, looks at the intruder, and CRUNCHES his cereal. At present, he shakes his head 'no' and swallows.

ELIAS
Are you famous?
(he spoons and CRUNCHES more cereal)
From television?

WOODBURN
I put you in that wheelchair.

Confused by this statement, Elias sets his spoon back into his cereal bowl and scrutinizes Woodburn. His eyes narrow with suspicion.

ELIAS
You're saying you're Chad?

WOODBURN
I am.

The disabled father appraises the strongman for a couple more seconds and reaches a conclusion.

ELIAS
Are you here to say you're sorry for what you did to me?

Stunned by this question, Woodburn stares at Elias.

ELIAS (CONT'D)
Go ahead then.
Apologize for crippling me.
Apologize for making it so that your mother had to become a-

The strongman SLAMS his fist into the television, which SHATTERS. Frowning, the disabled father shakes his head.

ELIAS (CONT'D)
I see you've still got that wild anger in you--just like my daddy did. Never could control-

Woodburn grabs the wheelchair by the handles and heaves Elias from his seat. The disabled father SLAMS into the wall, GRUNTS, and falls. His withered right leg SNAPS as he THUDS onto the floorboards beside the spilled cereal bowl.

ELIAS (CONT'D)
Go away! Leave!
(he swats the air)
You ain't got cause to hurt me more than you already did.

Holding the wheelchair with two hard fists, Woodburn approaches Elias.

WOODBURN
You killed James.

ELIAS
Your little brother drowned by accident.

WOODBURN
You threw him into the lake when he didn't know how to swim.

ELIAS
That's how I learned and that's how you learned--neither of us got drowned. It was just a accident.
(he shakes his head)
This whole world's always been survival of the fittest.

Casting a heavy shadow, the strongman raises the wheelchair over his disabled father.

WOODBURN
Do you think you're fit enough?

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
Put down that chair or I'll shoot!

Woodburn glances at a mirror on the wall and sees the reflection of Sheriff Jorgenson, who is standing in the doorway with a raised revolver. The strongman does not move.

WOODBURN
There's a motorhome at the bottom of the lake. Fish it out so you can bury the people who're inside.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Okay. Now put down-

WOODBURN
You know I could've whipped you this afternoon, right?
It's only because of your girl that I didn't.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
I know you could've.
(he nods his head)
Now put down that-

ROARING, the strongman swings the wheelchair at his disabled father. The tall lawman squeezes the trigger.

Metal bars SHATTER Elias's ribcage, and a gunshot BOOMS.

The bullet SMACKS Woodburn's right shoulder. GRUNTING, he THUDS to his knees, grabs something, and raises his burnt left fist. Cereal bits fall from his hand, and something metallic glimmers.

SHERIFF JORGENSON (CONT'D)
Don't!

The strongman plunges the spoon handle through his father's left eyeball and deep into his brain.

A second gunshot BOOMS. Woodburn's head jerks forward as the bullet CRACKS his skull. Sheriff Jorgenson silently curses.

GRUNTING, Woodburn collapses on top of the crushed wheelchair and Elias. Fury fades within the strongman as his heart slows down and stops.

His clenched fists relax...

...but then tighten again in death.

CRACKLING footfalls sound outside of the house, and Sheriff Jorgenson looks toward the window.

SHERIFF JORGENSON (CONT'D)
(calling out)
It's already over.

Gun raised, Deputy Thatcher appears on the far side of the pane and scans the morbid tableau.

DEPUTY THATCHER
Is there any reason to call an ambulance?

Sheriff Jorgenson walks closer to the Woodburns and sees for certain that both men are dead.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
There's no reason.

INT. PATROL CAR - LATER

It is nearly midnight. Headlights shine upon tangled swampland trees as Deputy Thatcher drives Sheriff Jorgenson east toward central Pinebranch. Both officers are worn down from the grisly events of the day.

DEPUTY THATCHER
Right before we went in, Bessier radioed that eight more state police turned up.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Okay. You and him and Taylor should get some sleep.

DEPUTY THATCHER
You need to sleep.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
I don't think I'll be able to for a while.

The stocky fellow looks at the tall lawman, whose mind turns morbid thoughts.

DEPUTY THATCHER
If you want to talk, I've got an ear pointed in your direction.

Sheriff Jorgenson ruminates while the twisted branches of trees reach out from the sides of the road.

DEPUTY THATCHER (CONT'D)
Sheriff...?

SHERIFF JORGENSON
I'm just thinking about my part in what happened today.

Deputy Thatcher dials the wheel to follow the bending road.

DEPUTY THATCHER
You killed the bad guy.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
There was anger--an animal's anger--inside of that strongman. In his blood, in his fibers. What he did to his father--as a kid and just now--and what he did to all those people at Gawky's and the pool hall.

The tall lawman looks down and rubs his swollen knuckles.

SHERIFF JORGENSON (CONT'D)
And earlier today, I stirred all that up with my fists.

DEPUTY THATCHER
He had it coming.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Partly--because of his age--though it's the woman who decides whether or not the clothes are coming off.
(he rubs his knuckles)
Heather wasn't a virgin yesterday. Or even last year.

A low-hanging tree branches SCRAPES across the roof.

DEPUTY THATCHER
I'm certain that what he did tonight had a lot more to do with the circus getting attacked than what you did.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Probably...but I was a part of it. How much, I'll never know for certain.

DEPUTY THATCHER
What you did was understandable.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Yeah. But not lawful.

Sheriff Jorgenson looks up from his swollen hands and at the swampland trees.

SHERIFF JORGENSON (CONT'D)
And maybe that guy from the sideshow was right. Maybe I didn't send officers to the circus because of what happened there with Heather.
(he shakes his head)
They requested help, and I didn't give it to them.

The stocky fellow tries to think of something comforting to say to his superior, who is also his friend.

DEPUTY THATCHER
Nobody could've expected-

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Watch out for this bridge-

Sheriff Jorgenson points ahead, and Deputy Thatcher slows down the patrol car. The old bridge shifts and GROANS as the vehicle crosses over a river that is more mud than water.

SHERIFF JORGENSON (CONT'D)
I know you wanna make me feel better about what happened--and I appreciate that--but today I made some very bad decisions.
I acted in anger and failed as a representative of the law.

Tires return to the dirt on the far side of the bridge. Uncomfortably, Deputy Thatcher looks at Sheriff Jorgenson.

DEPUTY THATCHER
You didn't-

The tall lawman gestures dismissively.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
That's how I see it.
A lot of people died or got hurt for no real reason, and Pinebranch, Louisiana turned into a place that'll be known nationally as a crime scene. I got tarnish on my badge and my conscience...and I'll have to live with that.

Deputy Thatcher looks concernedly at Sheriff Jorgenson.

SHERIFF JORGENSON (CONT'D)
But there's one thing I can still do right, and that's be a better father to Heather.
It won't fix any of what happened in town today, but it's important.

EXT. CAMPGROUNDS BEHIND THE CIRCUS TENT - 5 AM

The eastern sky glows blue, but the sun has not yet risen on the charred remains of Nickel Harrington's Travelling Circus.

Chest bandaged, holding a plasma bag, and wearing mint green hospital clothes, Young Mountain limps through the blackened grass alongside Paloma, who is dressed in the same type of garments and has gauze affixed to the powder burned right half of her face. Together, the injured couple proceeds through the wreckage and toward the brown and tan motorhome that once belonged to Woodburn. Sitting on the steps of this vehicle and smoking a cigar is Harry the Human Crab.

INT. KITCHEN / JORGENSON'S HOUSE - DAWN

A bolt SNAPS. Dishevelled and bleary-eyed, Sheriff Jorgenson closes the front door, twists the lock, and walks into the kitchen, the windows of which face the rising sun. The tall lawman squints as he strides across the bright linoleum toward the refrigerator.

HEATHER (O.S.)
Daddy?

Pausing, Sheriff Jorgenson looks to his left. Quiet FOOTFALLS sound as Heather pads up the hallway and into the kitchen.

HEATHER (CONT'D)
I heard you come in.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
I tried to be quiet.

HEATHER
You were...I just haven't been able to get back to sleep since we came home from Uncle Jim's.
Is everything okay now...?

For a moment, the tall lawman considers how much he should or should not reveal to his daughter about the events of the previous evening.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Things've settled down...and the state police are here, helping us out.
(he gestures to the fridge)
Do you want some fruit salad?

Heather nods her head and walks toward the table as Sheriff Jorgenson withdraws a cellophane-covered bowl from the refrigerator, shuts the door, and claims two forks.

The father sets the food and utensils upon the table and hugs his daughter. Tears glimmer in the freckled brunette's eyes, and in those of the tall lawman.

HEATHER
Are you still mad at me?

SHERIFF JORGENSON
No.

HEATHER
Did Chad do something wrong?

SHERIFF JORGENSON
We'll talk about that another time.

Sheriff Jorgenson wipes his eyes, pulls out a chair for Heather, and then claims the nearest seat for himself.

SHERIFF JORGENSON (CONT'D)
And please darling...you've gotta be more careful.
You're as pretty as your mother, and you're a very curious young lady who wants to think the best of everyone, but being like that can get you into trouble.

HEATHER
It sounds like you're saying I'm naive.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
I meant what I said the way that I said it, but I suppose you could take it that way.
(he thinks for a moment)
Maybe it's my fault for being so protective and for not taking you anywhere to see how other places are.
But whatever the reason, everybody has strengths and weaknesses, positives and negatives, and the best way to find happiness is to be aware of your own.

HEATHER
Okay.
(she thinks for a moment)
I bet that's why Chad and some of those others work at the circus.

SHERIFF JORGENSON
Probably.

The tall lawman takes the freckled brunette's right hand between his palms and grins.

SHERIFF JORGENSON (CONT'D)
When your mother gets up, let's have a talk about the three of us taking a trip somewhere, okay?

Heather smiles brightly, leans forward, and kisses her father, Sheriff Jorgenson.

INT. WOODBURN'S MOTORHOME - SAME

Woodburn's Motorhome RUMBLES from the campground. Young Mountain sits behind the wheel, and Paloma occupies the passenger's seat. Sprawled out in the body of the vehicle are Clementine, Dirty Rita, and Harry the Human Crab.

HARRY THE HUMAN CRAB
It still smells like Wendy in here.

Nobody responds to this comment about the missing dancer.

The knife thrower dials the steering wheel clockwise, and the motorhome rolls onto the inclined dirt road that leads back to the interstate.

A GUNSHOT echoes, and a big firearm BOOMS.

Young Mountain, Paloma, Clementine, Dirty Rita, and Harry the Human Crab look through the windshield. Standing at the edge of the bald cypress copse in a haze of gun smoke are two STATE POLICEMEN and three camouflaged HUNTERS who aim their weapons at Zulu, the burnt and bloodied lion escapee. At present, five raised firearms CRACK and BOOM. The beast jerks and GROWLS as bullets impact his hide.

Paloma, Clementine, Dirty Rita, and Harry the Human Crab look away as Young Mountain accelerates past the confrontation and continues toward the highway.

GUNSHOTS echo behind the departing motorhome, and the furious lion ROARS.

CUT TO BLACK

The End.